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

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LETTER FROM STAFF

Dear friend and colleague,

In the book *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1999), the authors Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore write: "Central to feminist and womanist piety is the theme of resistance to domination, abuse, and other evils. It is precisely this spirit of resistance that comes to powerful expression in the biblical prayer of lament" (p.73). In a way the articles contained in this issue of *Ministerial Formation* sample this spirit of resistance to evil as experienced through violent acts in various contexts in Philippines, Nicaragua, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Myanmar (Burma) and Russia. Violence and abuse of power take place in many forms but worst of all is when they become prevalent in the home and church institutions leaving sufferers traumatized and without help. In many cases, church leaders remain silent and oblivious to violence and abuse of power in the home, the church and in the society in general. These articles challenge us to speak out the truth with courage and vision.

We thank God for all individuals who refuse to be silenced and who gather courage and strength to tell their stories and others who research and voice what they have heard and witnessed in their endeavour to make a difference. It is also wonderful to have examples like the one in St. Petersburg, Russia where peacemaking has become an ecumenical engagement and where young people find their voice and purpose to be involved. We present this second issue on the theme of overcoming violence and peacemaking to theological institutions to remind us that the future leaders of churches and Christian institutions need to be fully engaged in peacemaking.

It is our hope and prayer that as we begin yet another new year we will reach out to the Rachels of this world so that there will be peace on earth and that we will become peacemakers and therefore "Children of God" (Matthew 5: 9).

Blessed 2005!

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**PASSION FOR PEACE:
FROM VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE TO A HEALING COMMUNITY**

Liza B. Lamis

Compassion (Rm. 9:15)

Listen to the water, air and earth: creation's treasure store.
They're wounded from the want of being listened to.
They cry and too few hear.
They slowly die and too few mourn.

And yet through those who give attention,
Who stretch both hands to touch, embrace and tend;
Through those who marvel, reverence, and kneel and cup the water,
feel the breath of heaven, and hear the humming earth,
a healing comes and there are seeds of hope:
there is tomorrow generating in today.

Listen to the stories, dreams and thoughts of those who have no voice.
And yet through these who give attention,
who stretch both hands to touch, embrace, receive;
through those who labor, claim their dignity
and drink the cup of suffering, breathe winds of change,
and earth their dreams in struggles,
healing and compassion come,
there are seeds of hope:
There is tomorrow generating in today.

Be still.
Be compassionate and just sharing in the truth.
In finding them,
you find yourself.

Kate Compston, Adapted

Introduction

The women delegates to the 20th General Convention of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) passed a unity statement (resolution) for the assembly to adopt. The resolution recommended, among other matters, a proclamation “that violence against women is a sin against God,” and it is incumbent for “all church leaders to act decisively on cases of violence against women, e.g., rape and sexual harassment, committed within the church.”¹

Reactions came from the floor, raised by a pastor inquiring if there are indeed cases of violence against women committed in the churches, and are these cases documented? Another pastor raised a question on the wisdom of explicitly stating violence against women as a sin against God, for apparently it is already a sin.

After the convention, the NCCP through its Women's Desk received informal requests for assistance to women who were battered, harassed or raped by a male clergy. It raised questions like: “what have your own churches done about the cases?” addressed to the victims; and, “how ready is NCCP to respond to cases like these?” A realization surfaced among the NCCP staff that the NCCP may not be that prepared and the churches are either tolerating or ignoring the incidences.

¹ Pre-NCCP Convention Women's Forum Statement “Towards a New Way of Being: Ecumenism in a Changing Circumstance,” NCCP 20th General Convention, 18-20 November 2001, Iloilo City.

As an institution NCCP have to prepare to respond by first examining why the churches would be remote and unfriendly to women victims. This process is introspective on the churches' commitment to overcome violence towards becoming a healing community. As women and men are all victims in the web and culture of violence (but especially the women and children) the journey towards wholeness is primarily a community task of the churches. To truly make peace, the churches must acknowledge the brokenness in them and its complicity in the perpetration of violence against women. The churches have to seriously accompany the victims among the flock towards healing and in building a wholesome community together.

Violence against women or VAW, as it shall be used throughout this paper, specifically refers to violence committed against women, precisely because they are women, and focuses on the category of sexual violence. Sexual violence is both violent and sexual, and the nature of the assault makes clear the totality of the violation of the person, psychologically, physically, and spiritually.²

This paper examines how patriarchy through silence in the churches impacts men and women but especially the victims of VAW, and proposes alternative paradigms towards equipping the NCCP member-churches in responding to VAW. It is within the specific context of the NCCP ministry that the issue is being explored in this paper. Until the churches have passion to work for the achievement of justice and compassion for the victims of VAW within their constituencies, violence could never be overcome and genuine peace would never be attained.

Confronting Violence against Women in the Churches

The NCCP, through a statement adopted during the final session of its 17th General Convention on 20-24 November 1995 in Iloilo City, expressed its "indignation over those who have inflicted indignities on women and who (would) shield the perpetrator." The statement echoed the sentiments of the participants in a National Consultation on Violence Against Women on October 4-7, 1995 in Tagaytay City, where testimonies and documented cases were presented.

The late Bishop Nelinda Briones of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, at that time in charge of the program unit on women, considered the adoption as a breakthrough after a heavy debate on the floor. However, there was also sadness in her "because when women voice out their situation, it seems that men did not believe it, that they would require cases and statistics for proof." "It is hard for the victims to speak of their sufferings and it is doubly hard when their feelings are questioned," she said.³

The NCCP called on its member churches to "take honest stock of women's plight and real situations and to recognize the reality and gravity of violence against women in the church." It also recommended that "member churches undertake immediate consultations, training programs and provide appropriate interventions to victims, including the establishment of crisis and counseling centers."

The recognition of women's rights is an uphill climb, to use Rev. Briones' words, and the restitution of justice and compassion for the women victims is doubly hard of an uphill climb.

Karen (not her real name) is a deaconess raped by a pastor. When the case was brought to the attention of the local church's Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, a dialogue was called for with her, with the pastor present. All that the committee wanted was reconciliation. When Karen brought the case to a women's counseling group, her church conference was alarmed that it called an investigation into the case through the church's commission on deaconess service. The conference appealed for internal settlement and containment of the case. The pastor was removed from his church as a disciplinary action, and only later to be given an assignment in a remote church.

² Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), 6.

³ Rev. Nelinda Briones, quoted in "NCCP Deplores Violence Against Women" *NCCP Newsmagazine*, October-December 1995, 29.

Karen questioned the action allowing for the re-assignment and the reply was that it was some “local arrangement” (between the pastor’s home and local church to where he is assigned). Karen was also informed that the bishop talked to her friends to request Karen to stop pursuing the case in civil courts.⁴

The bishop knew Minda. He listened and believed her. “When the bishop appealed to me not to bring the case to court to save the Church I felt a great relief,” Minda narrated. “But when he added that if I brought this to court it would be the end of (the inter-religious group that both Minda and Fr. CP belong to) I felt so dismayed. I did not want this to happen to the group. That is why I wanted justice through the bishop.”⁵

Rev. BA is a known womanizer and harasser of women. His church did not care, his wife even defended him. A group of church workers wrote the conference minister (assigned to lead a fair number of local congregations in an area) to complain, only to be ignored and the copy of the letter buried deep in the file archives. The order of the ordained ministry sanctioned de-robing as a disciplinary action which means Rev. BA ceases to be a minister. Later it was learned he transferred to another conference (or diocese) and was accepted there to continue in the ministry. The conference minister’s justification for accepting him is that “an erring person is not to be put down, but rather to be lifted up.”⁶

Almost all cases of rape perpetrated by the clergy personally known to this writer featured attempts of the church hierarchy to suppress the voices of the victims ranging from paying off to personal lobbying, to completely ignoring disciplinary actions meted out for erring clergy, to threats of disintegrating ecumenical unity.

The churches lacked the will to “manifest the true meaning of faith and ministry as God’s people through genuine respect and reverence for the integrity and dignity of women.”⁷ The NCCP statement remained rhetorical to this day. It would be an illusion to expect the churches to change dramatically a few years after having issued a clear statement on VAW.

Even then, it is but proper to call on the churches again, to take seriously the challenge to overcome violence not because of the Decade declaration, but because “there will be peace because everyone will work for justice” (Isaiah 32:17) especially for the women, the oppressed of all the oppressed.

The churches failed to critically reexamine at its theology, structures and practices and how it maintained the subjugation of women, thereby allowing the victimization of women. Moreover, they also failed structurally to redress victims, and to be a just and compassionate community for women and men, especially the abused and the victimized.

Until the church becomes
ready to listen to the stories of those who have no voice,
and give attention, stretch both hands to touch, embrace, receive;
through those who labor, claim their dignity and drink the cup of suffering,
breathe winds of change, and earth their dreams in struggles...
healing and compassion won’t come.

⁴ Names of victims and surrounding circumstances are changed to protect their identities. All cases used in paper are with permission, and are all known by the writer personally.

⁵ Minda, a protestant church worker, was raped by a catholic priest. Ceres Doyo, “Priest’s rape victim speaks” (2), *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 12 Sept 2003, 13. This case is also personally known to the writer.

⁶ Interview with some of the women church workers who worked for the de-robing of Rev. BA.

⁷ Excerpt of the NCCP 17th General Convention Statement on VAW, “NCCP Deplores Violence Against Women” *NCCP Newsmagazine*, October-December 1995, 29.

“Silence Is Violence”⁸

Patriarchy is broadly used here to mean

[T]he manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women to society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence and resources.⁹

There are no more theological, biblical and legal impediments for the participation and realization of the full humanity of women in the churches, at least among Protestants. Yet women are still marginalized, silenced and in fact, further violated. What is worse, this is being ignored and even tolerated, thereby normalizing and aggravating abuse. Silence remains to be the most ambivalent, and not only a violent manifestation of patriarchy in women, men and the churches.

Patriarchy in the churches does not only subjugate and oppress women. It impacts not only women, but the men as well and the churches themselves, though in different levels of victimization. It is in VAW that the predatory nature of patriarchy through silence is experienced as most brutal, and this is maintained in the patriarchal structure of the churches.

The recurring question from both men and women of whether there are documented cases to prove incidents show doubts and disbelief in the witness of women victims, thus silencing victims.

Minda made known her demands: that Fr. CP be removed from his position and subjected to disciplinary action. The bishop kept saying the word “reparation.” “But this is beyond reparation, Bishop,” Minda argued. “Buhay ang nakalás.” (A life had been snuffed out.) She brought up the abortion.

The bishop was stunned...the bishop brought (Minda and Fr. CP) to the oratory for further discussion. “There,” the bishop told Minda, “Father has owned up before the Blessed Sacrament and in my presence, are you now going to forgive him?” Minda immediately reiterated her demand for a written apology. So far, no written apology had been made. As the bishop supposedly said, “wala man written-written.” Earlier in another instance, the Bishop asked Minda, “Would it appease you if I transfer Fr. CP to another place?” Minda argued how sure are we that he will not do it again with other women.”¹⁰

Silence has to be enforced. Women should not be brought to speak in public. No wonder it is hard to document cases.

Silence about VAW confirms and strengthens the insidious power of sexism to deny women’s concrete experience and trivialize their worth as human beings. It reinforces the notion that they are less human than the men, thus justifying their violation.

Silence prevents men from regarding VAW as their own issue as well. Even if there are many men who do not abuse women, silence allows VAW to continue and brings men to believe it is all right and normal to abuse women. This is further strengthened by the belief that women were made for the pleasure of men, and it is natural for women to be abused.

There has been known instances where bishops personally made lobbies and attempted pay offs towards preventing the victims from speaking. If ever there are cases heard by the hierarchy, the tendency is to appeal to the virtue of reconciliation. Instead of seeking justice to constitute the ground for reconciliation, the victims are pressured to silence.

The church hierarchy would, by all means, defend the stability of the church as an institution at the expense of victimized women, the marginalized of all sectors in the churches. They are more

⁸ I am very much indebted to Theresa D. Balayon for the profound thoughts on the impact of silence on VAW to the churches, and for coining this phrase that has a ring of truth to it.

⁹ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 239, cited in Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 15.

¹⁰ As personally disclosed to me by Minda herself. She underwent crude abortion as per order of the priest.

interested in preserving the peace of silence than the peace that is founded on justice. This is reflected in the churches' pronouncement of VAW as a sin against God, and by just being silent about it as a sin against women. It seems that it is very hard to see the Imago Dei in women. It may be that this obtuse perception of VAW as a sin against God has led some abusers to ask forgiveness from God but never from the victim.¹¹ To ask God for forgiveness is far easier than from the one abused.

By remaining silent the churches affirm and encourage the practice of covering up clergy abuse, and conspire with other social institutions in making VAW "normal" or justifiable. In effect, they tacitly condone VAW therefore excusing themselves from supporting and helping victims. By imposing silence the churches break its covenant with God to respond to violence with justice and compassion, and confirm the notion that like any other social institutions, they are part of the problem rather than the solution. The churches' silence even contributed to the shaming of women victims.

Silence has denied the reality that VAW afflicts the churches as the Body of Christ, and undermines their credibility as a haven for the oppressed, making it the last place, or not the place, for honest sharing of pain and vulnerability.

Silence, perpetuated by shame and confusion, has privatized VAW. The victim and society's silence reciprocally reinforce each other. It made VAW difficult to bring to the open and make it a social issue by marginalizing it as unimportant. Secrecy or confidentiality is turned into a cunning device to perpetuate further abuse thus strengthening patriarchal hold over women and men. Consequently, silence has succeeded in keeping the victims in place, by maintaining their oppression and victimization. Silence itself is violent.

There is a suspicion that the visibility of a few women in church structures may have made churchwomen rest on this laurel and even boast of a certain degree of women's emancipation. By believing that this could not happen in a context where women are fully participating in all areas of church ministry, VAW is disregarded as an occurrence. It would be helpful to find out where women are located in the churches, and what are they doing.

The very nature of the hierarchical ordering of the churches reflects structural violence, where it has failed to address human suffering. In the case of the VAW victims, this same structure even caused more suffering by making it very painful and difficult for the victims to come out and get redress due to lack of institutionally defined policies fitted for addressing VAW. What works for others may not work for victims, owing to the deeply painful and totally violating nature of sexual abuse.

Structural violence occurs when people are harmed because of inequitable social arrangements. It occurs when the (social) order directly or indirectly causes human suffering.¹² Where churches fail to effectively address VAW, much less acknowledge its existence, violence is entrenched in its structures.

It is not only structures in the church that are violent. This intrinsic violence is justified and sacralized by its patriarchal theology and teachings. Mainstream, traditional male-centered and patriarchal theology does not only render women and their experiences invisible. As such it permits, legitimizes and even sacralizes the victimization of women. Situated in the sphere of disempowerment, women as are more likely at risk of falling into and being trapped in the lowest stratum of inequality which is violence.¹³ Patriarchy is further strengthened, and it succeeds in keeping women in a subjugated position.

Where men do not recognize their instrumentation as violators of women bearers of the divine image, they will remain silent. Where women recognize silence as a powerful tool to perpetuate their oppression, the code would never be broken and they remain complicit to male violence.

¹¹ I have been told of a repentant abusive pastor who asked forgiveness from the church council and from God but refused to ask forgiveness from his victim.

¹² Choice Okoro, "Redressing Structural Inequalities as the Next Phase for Women's Rights?" *Women's Concerns*, Fall 2003, 11.

¹³ Theresa Balayon, "Links Among Poverty, Violence Against Women, and Child Abuse," Manila.

Where churches turn away from its option for the afflicted and the marginalized by choosing to be silent about VAW, they undermine its prophetic role to resist and overcome violence. Their role as a source of empowerment and hope is negated. In this instance, the churches forsake its commitment as a sign of God's presence in the world.

Exploring Alternatives

How do we journey towards becoming a just and compassionate community towards healing and wholeness? It is right to rage and to criticize, but how do we overcome violence by cultivating a culture of peace? There are alternative ways of doing things, depending on our radical openness.

Judges 19:30 points us to a helpful alternative paradigm that the churches could employ. The case of the unnamed woman in Judges 19 is a classic story of VAW from a different time, yet full of similarities to ours with regards to silence about VAW. Judges 19 had been a subject matter of many excellent feminist theological writings. This suggested framework, informed and guided by the practical ways of Ron Claassen's concept of Restorative

Justice¹⁴ could give us insights on this journey. As the churches direct their hearts to all the unnamed women who experience violence, take counsel about the patterns which keep it going, and speak the truth about VAW, healing may begin.¹⁵

Directing Our Hearts to the Victims

Phyllis Trible says that the first command "to consider it" is more accurately translated as the Hebrew idiom "direct your heart" followed by the phrase "to her."¹⁶ Option for the poor and the oppressed is a radical expression of divine incarnation. This is rarely viewed though, with a conscious lens that includes women's perspective. Probably this has contributed to the marginalization of VAW among the churches' priority in mission, and the treatment of the women's movement for emancipation as an afterthought in the broader movements for liberation.

Claassen's concept of Restorative Justice focuses on human relationship, thus making VAW primarily an offense against human relationships, against women human beings and not only against God. It recognizes VAW as wrong and should not occur and that after it does, there are dangerous consequences as well as opportunities.

As a process to make things as right as possible including attending to the needs created by the offense, directing our hearts to the victims would mean prioritizing positive responses to their needs, by designing systems and procedures that provide interventions and encourage voluntary and cooperative change. It also means responding to the violation at the earliest point possible and with the maximum amount of voluntary cooperation and minimum coercion since healing in relationships and new learning are voluntary and cooperative processes. Restorative Justice prefers that offenses are handled using a cooperative structure from those most impacted by the offense in both sides (victim and abuser) to provide support and accountability.

Directing our hearts to the victims is also encouraging those who are guilty to admit guilt and focus the attention on putting right the wrong they have done. The abusers must acknowledge responsibility and begin addressing the grievances motivating their abusive acts. As soon as safety concerns are satisfied for all parties concerned especially for the victims, the offense is viewed as a teachable moment for the offender – an opportunity to encourage the offender to learn new ways of being and acting in the community.

What if offenders deny guilt and offense? Restorative Justice prefers that offenders who are not yet cooperative be placed in settings where the emphasis is on safety, values, ethics, responsibility,

¹⁴ Arche Ligo, "Reflections on Ron Claassen's Restorative Justice" in *In God's Image* Vol. 21, No. 2, June 2002, 29-32.

¹⁵ Mary M. Johnston, "Unnamed Women" in *Daughters of Sarah*, Summer 1994, 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

accountability and civility. (“If you want the lamb and the tiger to live together in the same forest, you don’t try to get them to communicate. You cage the bloody tiger!”) They should be exposed to the impact of abuse to the victims, be invited to learn empathy for the victims, and offer learning opportunities for personal change. They should also be continually invited to become cooperative and given the opportunity to demonstrate change. It then requires a follow up and accountability structure utilizing the natural community since keeping agreements is the key to building a trusting community.

Taking Counsel

Key to the task of constructing an integral theology that considers the importance of women’s experience is a critical awareness of women’s oppression and subjugation. Oppression implies subordination with victimization of the oppressed, while subordination would mean a dominance relation, including the possibility of a voluntary acceptance of subordination in exchange for protection and/or privilege, and does not imply that there is always evil intent on the part of the dominators. Though the historical experiences of women do include oppression, the term is inadequate because women themselves, more than any other group, have collaborated in their own subordination.¹⁷

It requires that the entirety of the human experience (and of the whole created order) be considered in the task of theological reconstruction for theology to be inclusive, integral and holistic; valid and relevant for women. Patriarchal theology prohibits men and women as equals from working together for total social transformation and for building a community of peace built on justice. This implies active participation of women in the theological discourse of the churches.¹⁸

Logically, structural inequalities in the churches have to go. Where the inferior status of women is legitimized in patriarchal structures and theology, violence is made more possible.¹⁹ Where women are considered co-equal human beings imaging the divine in their womanhood, reverence is cultivated in their otherness and not the inclination to dominate. Church structures should **reflect their commitment to the full personhood of women as bearers of the divine image, and to prevent degradation of that image.**

This theological reconstruction also inspires a decision to seriously cultivate broader interest on women’s issues. The issue of VAW may be an ambivalent topic to start with, but if the truth sets free, first it makes many miserable, so be it. VAW issues then are not only limited to women as they become the whole community’s concern.

Patriarchy spares no man and no woman, hence it is quite true that “to the degree that women manage to struggle for their own space, they liberate men as well.”²⁰ Hopefully this does not leave the men not doing anything for consciousness raising on women’s issues, as it should even encourage them to put in their contribution to hasten the day of justice. It is highly necessary therefore that both men and women, and even children, should build socialization that does not forget the perspective of women in interpreting reality and in charting the future.

Mark Taylor suggests a thorough examination of the patterning of sexism in the churches.²¹ Pastoral lay formation for men and women should scrutinize the pervading male and violent culture, how it shapes the reality and minds of women and men.

We need to look into an alternative “humane paradigm of manhood in which “real man” neither conquers nor protects, but simply behaves as a good neighbor (or human being) to women, children,

¹⁷ Gerda Lerner, cited in Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow?* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). 21.

¹⁸ Liza Lamis, “Baptist and Feminist: Towards a Feminist Reorientation of Baptist Women Ministers of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches” (thesis, Institute of Formation and Religious Studies) 81.

¹⁹ Joanne Carlson Brown, “Because of the Angels: Sexual Violence and Abuse”, in *Violence Against Women*, eds. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary shawn Copeland (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 3-10.

²⁰ Said by Carlos Mesters. Elsa Tamez, *Against Machismo*. trans. John Eagleson, (III: Meyer Stone, 1987), 78.

²¹ Mark Taylor, “Of Monsters and Dances: Masculinity, White Supremacy, Ecclesial Practice” in *Violence Against Women*, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Shawn Copeland, eds. (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 53-71.

and other men.²² Jesus' maleness presented no problem to women during his time, and even if it did, Jesus honestly opened up himself to women. It is said that the problem is not the maleness of Jesus, but that the males are so unlike Jesus. He repudiated control over others. It would be very interesting to see how our men today can embody this as the quintessential male value and live its consequences.

Speaking the Truth

Will making public cases of VAW facilitate the emergence of women as an agency in our society?²³ Or would women and men's intentional discussion of women's issues, facilitate the public exposure and end the privatization of VAW? It could work both ways and simultaneously. "When a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her."²⁴ It is also true with the men. In an atmosphere of trust and community, victims who are silenced by fear and isolation, would be profoundly encouraged to seek justice and support.

Truth-telling or story-telling (written or any documented form) facilitates increased awareness, consequently proportionately decreasing secrecy. It brings the churches to task towards formulation of policies that are biased towards the care and welfare of victims and for structural redress.

Story telling as a form of contesting the status quo creates solidarity among victims.²⁵ It facilitates sister bonding, as has been demonstrated by women in Mindanao cited above. That solidarity-bonding made possible for them to work together for the de-robing of an abusive minister. This is one little sign of hope that women church workers offered us.

Truth telling is a blessing and a gift to the churches. It is calling back the churches to its mission to overcome violence, to work for justice, healing and wholeness.

Conclusion

Listen to the stories, dreams and thoughts of those who have no voice.
And yet through these who give attention,
who stretch both hands to touch, embrace, receive;
through those who labor, claim their dignity
and drink the cup of suffering, breathe winds of change,
and earth their dreams in struggles,
healing and compassion come,
there are seeds of hope:
There is tomorrow generating in today.

Be still.
Be compassionate and just sharing in the truth.
In finding them,
you find yourself.

VAW continually poses a challenge to break the violent silence that engulfs the churches and deeply hurts the women victims. The call now is to be compassionate and just to the victims, to take counsel and put an end to our complicity to violence, and to bring ourselves to humility in speaking

²³ This is a question raised by a male friend whose background is the social sciences. He further adds: "what might be helpful for women in on the societal/general level, it is not automatically so in the personal, individual realm. Where sexual agency has not yet fully emerged, the personal is NOT ALWAYS political. Tomasito Talledo, letter to writer, 28 January 2004, Manila.

²⁴ Adrienne Rich, quoted in Anne Wilson Schaeff, "*Meditations for Busy Women*," (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1990), January 23.

²⁵ Taylor, "Of Monsters and Dances: Masculinity, White Supremacy, Ecclesial Practice," 53-71.

the truth. Our theological and structural paradigms must reflect a genuine commitment to the full personhood of women human beings.

Aruna Gnanadason believes that the victims' tears will baptize the church into a life of solidarity and resolute action.²⁶ But let us not wait for these tears to flood and toss the ecumenical boat where we are all in. We have this hope that the churches will find its true calling and selfhood in wading through the tumultuous waters from being perpetrators or victims of violence to a healing community with a passion for peace.

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²⁶ Aruna Gnanadason, "No Longer a Secret", (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), 60.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE CHURCH IN NICARAGUA:
HEARING THE SILENCED VOICES**²⁷

Brenda Consuelo Ruiz

Introduction

What do you associate your body with?

My body is like a puzzle that has been torn apart. Many have tried unsuccessfully to put it back together and I hope that God still loves the pieces. I have not felt good being a mound of small pieces but God will put the puzzle back together with each piece in its rightful place. ("Mercedes", a 39 year old Nicaraguan woman, mother of 3 children, member of an Apostolic Church and survivor of 16 years of domestic violence).

What has been your experience with your body as a woman?

The truth is that I suffered much abuse and sexual harassment from men in my family. That destroyed my nerves and marked my life for ever. I was raped by one of them when I was 11 years old. I felt that my body was not important for anyone. When I told my mother that I was being sexually harassed by a family member, at times she made snide comments when he was present, at other times she would tell me I surely liked what he did to me. I only remember crying a lot and praying for God to protect me; but every night I was abused and was told "if you tell anyone I will kill you". I was only a little girl.

When I was going to get married I told my husband-to-be that I was not a virgin any more. One of his last offenses to me was to say "I never believed your story that you were raped". I will never forget the pain I felt at that moment. It was like throwing salt in an open wound. ("Petronila", a 35 year old Nicaraguan woman, mother of 4 children, member of a Mennonite church and survivor of 15 years of abuse).

I was 15 when I fell madly in love with him. We got married and he started to hit me for any reason. He belonged to the army and always carried guns with him. Sometimes at night he would put his pistol against my neck and I would not sleep all night. When he came home drunk at night I had to jump the fences holding my children while trying to avoid the gun shots. After a big fight he wanted to make love to me and when I refused he just raped me. One night he was beating me up really hard and my little girl tried to intervene, he slapped her across the room and she hit her head against the wall.

I told my mother and my mother-in-law about the abuse and they both told me not to leave him because I was his wife and I had to put up with him. One time after a very bad beating my youngest girl said: "Mummy, you look like a monster", and she began to cry. ("Ana Cristina", a 27 year old Nicaraguan woman, mother of 2 children, catholic and survivor of 5 years of abuse).

Domestic violence is a topic that gets a lot of attention in the media in Nicaragua today. Sadly enough, the same is not true (of) in the churches, both Catholic and Protestant.

Statistics show that Domestic Violence in Nicaragua is on the increase. The Police reports that in 1991 they investigated 784 cases of violence against children, in 1992 the number increased to 967, in 1993 to 1,146 and in 1994 they investigated 1,942. The reports of domestic violence cases increased 88% in 1997 in relationship to cases reported in 1996 and 3,900 cases were reported in 1998.

²⁷ This article was first published in Journal of Religion & Abuse, Vol. 1, Issue 4, p..5-27. It is reprinted with permission.

In 1996 the Ministry of Health declared Domestic Violence to be a public health problem. The official statistics show that one out of every two women in Nicaragua has been abused by her partner sometime in her life, but it is common knowledge that the real figures are much higher.

A study done in 1992 in (6) six barrios of Managua showed that 75% of the women had experiences some kind of abuse in their lives. In a survey done in 1998 with nursing students of a private university the results showed that 77.8% of them had been victims of abuse sometime in their lives. Why such a high percentage? Some answers, necessary to understand the phenomena, can be found in our national context.

The Nicaraguan context

There are several important factors that contribute to such a widespread prevalence of domestic violence in our country today.

A historical patriarchal culture

From the time the conquerors from Spain came to our continent, our native indians were regarded as soulless beasts; and the indian women even inferior to the indian men. The Spanish regarded themselves as superiors in every way and the indian women were objects of every type of abuse including massive rapes that brought forth a new race: The Mestizos (96 % of the actual Nicaraguan population). This new race was rejected by both the Spanish (they were the sons and daughters of the despised female indians) and by the male indians (they were the sons and daughters of their hated slavers).

The Spanish also forced the indians to convert to Christianity. By the time Nicaragua gained its independence from Spain, patriarchy was well established with Machismo as its Latin American expression.

A system of economic gender inequalities

Careers where women are heavily represented (like school teachers, nurses, maids, etc.) are the poorest paid. Women in the same position (than) **as** men and with the same training are still paid less money and there are fewer women in top managerial positions. Surprisingly enough Nicaragua is the only country in the world where there has been a woman President and Vice President at the same time. However, official statistics show that women are the poorest of the poor, the “feminization” of poverty as it has come to be known.

According to an economic analysis done in 1998 by the Fundacion Internacional para el Desafio Economico Global (FIDEG), women earn 28.5% less than men. It is harder for a woman to support her family if she separates from her husband. Even though the same is true for women in first world countries, the big difference in our country is that separation may actually hinder the very survival of the family, not just stop the children from going to a private school or having nice clothes.

A sexist educational system

The language and pictures in books used in primary and secondary schools still show men working in the office, businesses, etc.; and the women with aprons at home, taking care of babies and cooking. The inclusive language is still sneered at in most places or used only when it is convenient. Girls in schools are still taught cooking and hand crafts, whereas the boys are taught carpentry and electricity. Many women stay in abusive relationships because they have internalized this pattern of passive dependency.

Antifeminist teachings in churches

St. Augustine and St. Thomas's teachings are very much alive in many churches in Nicaragua today with only small changes. St. Paul's antifeminist verses are very emphatically used, especially in conservative Protestant denominations where women are taught to dress "with modesty" and are not allowed to be ordained or to hold high official positions, but are expected to cook and serve meals. Women and men in some churches seat in separate isles so as to avoid temptations and concentrate on the worship better.

What the churches traditionally teach about the headship of the man, suffering, divorce, etc. is not helpful to women who are in situations of abuse.

As a result of these teachings, many women still consider abuse as "the cross they have to bear"; it is part of being a woman, like menstruation or labor pains. "Asi es la vida", they say, assuming that is the way life is supposed to be and it can be no different. Men have the right to hit their wives and women have only to put up with it.

An inadequate legal system

Even though a new law was recently passed (Law 230) to prevent and sanction Domestic Violence thanks to the ceaseless efforts of the National Network of Women against Violence, a great number of judges and police officers still ignore the law. Aside from that, the legal process is still cumbersome for many women, especially for those who live in the rural area, are uneducated or can not take time off work.

A study done in 1995 in Nicaragua showed that approximately only 5 of every 100 abused women go to the Police to file a complaint. Of the filed complaints, about 45% are resolved extra-judicially, more often than not to the man's advantage and with no long term protection for the victims. 43% are not followed up by the victim, usually after she discovers she can not support the family alone with her husband in jail or when his family pressures her into getting him out of jail. Only 12% of the filed complaints complete the legal process. Of these, only a very small segment of aggressors are convicted and of these many get out very quickly by paying a low (bailing fee.) bail.

Socio - political stressors

A prolonged war situation: At least one out of every 5 Nicaraguan families lost family members during the War of Insurrection against the Somoza regime and the Contra War (financed largely by the United States government). The war left 30,000 people dead (3,000 of them were children); 10,000 wounded; 15,000 orphans and thousands of disabled children, women and men. (Is it true that only 3,000 of the dead were children? But they are 50% of the population.)

The traumas associated with the war; not only of the families that lost members but also of the veterans; the displaced families; the civilian survivors and witnesses of massive rapes, killings and tortures; as well as the high number of firearms left from the war that people kept in hiding; show their presence in the increasing violence in our society. Violence has become a very common way to handle conflicts. Suicide rates have (triplicated) **tripled** in the last few years and criminality is on the rise.

Economic and political instability: International unjust economic relations, foreign interventions on our internal affairs, successive corrupt governments, the Contra War and the neo-liberal policies resulting from the Structural Adjustment Program to pay the Foreign Debt have created enormous economic and political instability and polarization. Our country has gone rapidly from a left wing revolutionary government to a far right wing government in a short time. The entire system and people's lives have changed without much time for adjustment.

Migration from the rural to the urban areas: There is a heavy migration of landless peasants from the countryside to the urban areas of the country. About 26.2% of the population are uprooted in their own country or have left for other countries in search of employment. 50% of those leaving their families behind are women extended family ties so important for survival are being severed as well as people's connection to their land, culture, community life and survival skills. These migrants and their offspring often become involved in alcoholism, gangs, delinquency, crime, drug traffic, prostitution and general family disintegration.

I was abused as a little girl. My father abandoned my mother when she was 5 months pregnant (of) with me. Later she found herself another husband but he didn't like me and resented every piece of food I put in my mouth. I would help neighbors with their housework and would earn my keep since I was a little girl. When I turned 12 years old I went to Managua to work to help my mother. I worked as a maid and one day a man raped me and since then I learned to hate men. ("Andrea", 29 years old, 4 children, Pentecostal).

Social consequences of a high incidence of natural disasters: For being a small country, Nicaragua has had more than its share of natural disasters: Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, droughts, tidal waves and more recently Hurricane Mitch. The great loss of lives, land, houses, farming implements, community life, etc., contribute greatly to personal stresses that may lead to either dependency or violence.

High percentage of unemployment and sub-employment: The figures of unemployment and sub-employment range from 60 to 70% of the economically active population. The people who are lucky enough to have jobs oftentimes subject themselves to detrimental working conditions and to abuses from their bosses, including sexual harassment. Few situations stress families more than a prolonged unemployment.

He was very bitter because he could not get a job. He would get mad even with his mother and he would take revenge on me, even though I was pregnant at the time. ("Elisa", 40 years old, 6 children, Pentecostal).

Massive poverty: According to figures for 1998, 82.2% of the population in Nicaragua receives income under the poverty level and 43.6% under extreme poverty. These statistics reflect research done before Hurricane Mitch, which came to even worsen this situation. The stress that this poses on men and women is unimaginable.

Overcrowded living conditions: All of the previously mentioned factors plus a serious shortage of housing contribute to many families living together, sometimes not even related by blood or kinship; diminishing thus privacy for family members and augmenting the possibilities for (promiscuity) **sexual abuse**. Close to 63.92% of the total Nicaraguan population lack adequate housing.

A high percentage of single mothers: About 50% of all heads of household are women. Of these families, 63.5% are poor. The fertility rate is 3.1 children per woman in the urban areas and 5.4 in the rural areas. Nicaragua has the highest percentage of adolescent mothers in Central America and one of the highest growth rates of all Latin America. Even though 50% of the population is younger than 16, sex education is not widely available and access to contraceptives is somewhat limited. Young women, once abandoned by their first partner search for new ones that will hopefully help them support their children and provide moral support as well; oftentimes increasing in the process the number of mouths they have to feed.

Personal factors

After examining these elements of our national context it is important to examine also some of the personal factors that may contribute to the fact that so many Nicaraguan women enter and remain in situations of domestic violence. It will be important to hear the women explain them with their own words.

Economic and emotional dependency

A study done in the city of Leon showed that the highest incidence of domestic violence was suffered by women who had 4 or more children, had less than a grade school education and were very poor.

My life was very bitter. My husband was not a Christian, he drank a lot, gave me a hard life and would often say that he had another woman. He liked rooster fights and if I killed one of his roosters to eat he would bend his machete hitting my back with it. Sometimes I would go out to find odd jobs in order to feed my children but when he came home and didn't find me there he would abuse me. I was desperate. I felt tormented and wanted to die, so much so that one day I drunk poison. ("Raquel", 48 years old, 3rd grade education, 16 children, Pentecostal).

Pregnancy

Abuse is perpetrated more frequently and more severely during pregnancy, especially in adolescent women. Research done in 1998 at the national level showed that 36% of all cases of abuse detected took place when the women were pregnant.

I was never treated well by him when I was pregnant. I suffered 3 miscarriages and the last one was the most painful because of the advanced stage and because it was caused by abuse. ("Petronila", 35 years old, 4 children, Mennonite).

Low self-esteem

The woman who has low self-respect and self-esteem to begin with, is more likely to enter and remain in abusive relationships. The prolonged abuse deepens that low self-esteem even more. There are several issues that may contribute for a Nicaraguan woman to have a low self-esteem today.

Low perception of self: If the woman is perceived or perceives herself as slow, defective, useless, not very intelligent or inferior for any reason, she is more likely to choose a less than ideal partner. If he turns out to be abusive, she assumes that the abuse is her fault and the perpetrator is right in acting violently towards her.

My husband does not love anyone, neither me nor my children. He feels superior to me because he finished Junior High School and I only got as far as the 4th grade. ("Mirna", 34 years old, 3 children, Pentecostal)

Loosing virginity before marriage: Men are encouraged to become sexually active early in life to prove their manhood. He is considered more of a man if he does it with a virgin. However, the young woman he does it with is then considered second hand merchandise as virginity is still very much valued in our society. She feels she is worth much less and whoever marries her is right in abusing her because he was not "the first". "Maria" explains it better:

My first experience was with a man who took away my innocence and then left me. I kept the secret from my parents because I was ashamed and because I wanted to avoid being humiliated and abused. It was hard for me to get over it. When I fell in love again I told my boy friend and he seemed to accept it and married me, but for many years I have felt self-conscious, especially since he has had so many lovers that he has lost count. He has not respected me as a wife. Maybe if I hadn't made my first mistake I would not have married him. But I was very self-conscious about what had happened and since he accepted me in spite of it I didn't even notice he was a womanizer. The first one took my virginity away but the second one has taken away even my desire to live and to struggle. ("Maria", 30 years old, 3 children, Pentecostal).

Adherence to traditional views about sex roles

If the woman believes that her duty in life is to be a good wife and mother and to obey her husband no matter what the cost, she is a good candidate to be a victim of violence.

Due to my ignorance I suffered a lot of physical abuse and sexual frustration in my marriage. Because I loved my husband and had learned that I was to serve him I dared not to say anything. I never asked him to satisfy me sexually because I was embarrassed to. When he was being unfaithful to me I was afraid he would reject me. We lived together for 16 years, but it was a sad relationship, with no charm". ("Mercedes", 39 years old, 3 children, Apostolic).

Part of the traditional view of the sexual roles is that the husband can control the life of the wife entirely; he has total power over her.

My spiritual life is affected when he comes home because I can not go to church. He says "If you go to church that means you don't love me". So I stay home cooking his supper. ("Rosario", 43 years old, 12 children, Pentecostal).

My husband is very jealous and I can't do anything on my own. I go to church with him but he doesn't let me greet or speak alone with the brethren. When I talk with the sisters he wants to know what we talked about. I never go alone anywhere. I don't have freedom. I can only go out with him but I don't like it because he is very domineering and talks down to me. Anything he says has got to be the truth. ("Teresa", 33 years old, one child, Pentecostal).

Another expression of the internalized traditional role is the fear of what the man can do to her if she leaves him. Men often threaten their wives that if she leaves he will kill her, take the children away from her, bring another woman into the house, kill himself, etc., etc. Because she knows of his violent behavior, she will not easily break the bond of fear.

Internalized antifeminist religious beliefs

When women learn very early in life that the husband is the head of the wife and that she should be subjected to him; in a situation of violence it would be very hard to leave him or she would be violating "the will of God". Many women learn that they are responsible for maintaining the family together and if the marriage doesn't work it is her fault.

Reading the Bible and praying is very important. The Bible is good for giving you strength, for learning, for correcting, for teaching; the Bible fills us with faith. The Bible helps us very much. There is a Bible verse in Proverbs 14:1 that I like very much: "The wise woman builds her house. But the foolish tears it down with her own hands". I want to be a wise woman and that means to be quiet. It's better not to talk about your problems. ("Teresa", 33 years old, one child, Pentecostal).

"I was to blame. If I had had enough faith, if I had continued praying and fasting this family would not have been torn apart". ("Juana", 37 years old, 2 children, Pentecostal).

A personal theology that is accomplice of abuse

Women tend to develop their personal theology from their pastor's teachings. The theological expressions and practices presented here represent more the internalized teachings from the pastors than the women's original theological thinking.

In many cases the women pray for strength in order to stay in the relationship, not strength to leave the abusive partner.

I would pray and I would tell the Lord: "Ay, Lord, that your will be done and not mine, but give me strength and courage to go forth till the day I die". ("Angela", 45 years old, 2 children, Pentecostal).

I prayed, prayed and prayed and while I did, I felt peace and as if all my problems had been solved already. ("Andrea", 29 years old, 4 children, Pentecostal).

Many women blame the Devil for the abusive behavior, the husband is not be held responsible:

My husband was very jealous and I was inexperienced. Satan himself had to do with this. I started talking with my husband, then we would have a discussion and then we ended up fighting. ("Gloria", 22 years old, no children, Pentecostal).

When my husband was of the world he was very jealous. Now that he is a Christian he has kept his jealousy towards me. It is important to pray and to fast to get that unclean spirit out, which cannot come out by anything but prayer and fasting. ("Ana", 41 years old, 2 children, Pentecostal).

If the man is a "non convert" that is one more reason for the woman to stay with him. Supporting the abuse meekly may be a way to bring him to salvation. If Christ died in the cross to save us, why can't she put up with a little abuse?

Some women assume responsibility for the violence:

I felt guilty because I acted incorrectly as if I was not a Christian. When my husband abused me while he was running around with other women I acted with much jealousy and jealousy is not good. ("Celina", 36 years old, 2 children, Pentecostal).

Other women are more concerned about being "good Christian wives" and forgiving the perpetrator than about their own safety or dignity:

I suffer greatly. My husband would parade with his mistresses right in front of my face. I felt hurt and I asked the Lord to give me strength to forgive my husband. Six years ago he abandoned me in a farm we were looking after. He now lives with another woman. He built a house for her but he never built a house for me. I thank God for keeping me alive and for not having been kicked out of the farm. ("Rosario", 43 years old, 12 children, Pentecostal).

The Cycle of Violence is very well entrenched largely because of this theology of forgiveness:

I have been with my husband for 13 years. For me it has been a hard struggle. He drank, was very abusive and unfaithful. He left me for 2 years, then came back and asked me to forgive him. I accepted him back. Now, for every little thing I complain about, he says he is going to change me for another woman. I wish I could leave him but then I think: "What if I end up in the hands of another man just as bad. My children will suffer". That's why I put up with him. I keep hoping he will change. ("Celina", 32 years old, 2 children, Pentecostal).

There is a lot of guilt associated with anger and with wanting to leave:

Spiritually I did not feel right because my heart was hardened. My faith was lacking but I did not want to be a bad witness and leave the paths of the Lord, even though I wanted to run away. I would say to myself "I cannot do this to my children, I have to help them". My children stopped me from leaving. ("Ana", 41 years old, 2 children, Pentecostal).

Feelings of isolation from family and friends

Even though women are usually involved with the extended family and in community life, sometimes the shame associated with the abuse and the social pressure make her feel isolated.

I suffer greatly because I am not taken into account for anything by my in-laws. I don't occupy the place of a wife. He would go out every night and his family would tell me: "The man is of the street and the woman is of the house". He never hugs or kisses me or nothing. What I have received is abuse from his family. They kick me out of the house; throw my clothes out into the street. I have not left because of my children. What I do is to hear and bear it because I don't have a place to go. ("Mirna", 34 years old, 3 children, Pentecostal).

The fact that the church doesn't address the issue of domestic violence contributes to this isolation as the abused women may feel they are the only ones suffering it or that maybe it is something they brought on themselves. She may feel too her spirituality could be criticized if her situation is known and her testimony could be found lacking because she has not had enough faith to change her situation. Her anguish goes largely unheard.

Lack of knowledge about her rights, legal resources and possible sources of outside support

In many of the Protestant churches in Nicaragua today women and men have a very strong dualistic view of the world: The church is godly and the world is sinful. Christians should have nothing to do with the world and its institutions. This makes it very difficult for women to seek help outside of the church when they do not find the help they need there. There is mistrust even of Christian institutions, especially if they are led by women.

The women often find support in each other in church, through sharing and prayer, and that is enough to help them feel better even if it does not solve the situation.

Domestic violence in her family of origin: Women who grow up in homes where they are exposed to violent behavior learn that that is normal and that is the way a man shows a woman that he loves her. She is not likely to get any support from her family either.

"You think you are the only one this is happening to?" - my mother would say when she was advising me not to leave him. My mother-in-law would say "you have to keep the marriage together. Remember you are his wife and you have to put up with him, he is the father of your children". So I went back to him. ("Ana Cristina, 27 years old, 2 children, Catholic).

The church's responses

The churches in Nicaragua have responded to domestic violence very much in the same way than many Christian churches around the world, although some changes are beginning to show. Some of the ways in which they are responding to situations of abuse are:

Silence and complicit

Most pastors act as if domestic violence is an unknown disease in their congregation. Some may genuinely believe that because their church members "have Christ in their hearts" that automatically means never ending happiness in their families, unless the Devil intervenes. But their understanding of the Devil is that it is the impersonation of malignant forces that attacks the off-guard Christian from the outside. This Devil gets blamed for a lot of sins perpetrators choose to do; and in sharing this view, the church lets the perpetrator "off the hook" in sheer complicity.

The image of perfection expected from a good Christian family puts pressure on its members to not confess or denounce anything that may tarnish this image. And if there is ever acknowledgment of the violence, the common recipe (usually for the woman only) is to pray and to fast, oftentimes debilitating her even more physically. If the situation does not change, that is a proof that she is lacking in faith and Christian maturity.

Violence is considered a personal, individual issue; there is no analysis whatsoever about the social factors involved with it. The closest churches come to social analysis is to blame men's violence on alcohol, drugs (also impersonations of the Devil) and unemployment.

An interesting phenomenon that takes place is that when an abusive husband becomes a Christian, he often stops the physical abuse but continues or (increments) **increases** the emotional abuse. If she complains about this abuse to the pastor the response is usually that she should be thankful that he is now behaving better and that she should keep hoping and praying that God will finish eradicating the evil in him.

But the denial that most men around the world experience about this issue is very evident in Nicaragua as well. There are some pastors who actually abuse their families and/or their parishioners, what could be expected of their teachings?

I don't trust the pastor because there are a lot of injustices in the Christian life and abuse of power from the clergy. I am disillusioned with pastors. ("Maria", 50 years old, 5 children, Pentecostal).

In the by-laws of two of our largest and most progressive Protestant denominations domestic violence is not even once mentioned as a cause for dismissal from membership from a church or a clerical position. In a book about incest available in Christian bookstores in Nicaragua, there is a lot about the needs of the victim and the needs of the perpetrator, a lot also about forgiveness but not a word about restitution.

In churches the men resent any initiatives to discuss issues regarding family life because nobody has the right to tell them how to run their families. After all, men are "the head of the family".

Blaming the victim and siding with the perpetrator

Very often the woman is blamed directly for the abuse: She was not a good wife and was not taking good care of the husband. She may be blamed indirectly: There may have been an unrecognized sin in her life God is punishing her for or that's what she deserves for marrying an "unconverted".

The cause of domestic violence is when there is no communication and the wife does not take good care of her home. ("Pentecostal woman pastor from a rural area).

I talked with the pastor. I noticed he didn't pay much attention to my problem. I believe he sided with my husband, because he thought my husband was acting correctly and I was misbehaving. ("Mirna", 34 years old, 3 children, Pentecostal).

Standing in solidarity with the victims:

A few churches are beginning to react differently. Some as a result of younger and better theologically trained pastors (including women pastors), and others as a response to the many efforts of feminist movements both within and outside of the church. Some pastors have been willing to confront the abusers and stand with the victims, some are daring to mention domestic violence in their sermons and Sunday School classes. But they are still a very small minority.

In the cases where the pastor "allows" the woman to seek help outside of the church, it is not known whether he prefers for her to search for help outside so that he does not have to deal with the issue himself.

If she wants to seek help outside of the church I think that's a good idea. That's what professionals are there for. (Pentecostal pastor from an urban area).

But the abused women themselves, especially the leaders, are raising their voices:

My husband was a womanizer and I didn't realize it because I was very submissive. I did everything the way he liked it, even though I didn't like it myself, but just to keep him happy. But now I know that was not right because the woman should not be too submissive. I had a very mistaken view of marriage and there was no one to tell me otherwise. ("Julia", 40 years old, 2 children, Sunday School Secretary).

It would be good to talk about domestic violence because there are women in the church that are being abused and out of shame, fear of their husbands or embarrassment from their pastors are not saying it. ("Andrea", 29 years old, 4 children, President of the local women's group).

The help that the church should give in situations of abuse should be in the way of counseling and constant visits. It is important to counsel the husbands and their wives. ("Marta", 60 years old, one child, deaconess in the church).

Videos and films about domestic violence should be shown. They should talk about things openly. I have passed through very negative things in my life. I think that communication, love and appreciation in the couple are very important. ("Mirna", 34 years old, 3 children, Pentecostal).

These voices are being raised after years of abuse and also after years of these women being involved in community organizations and more progressive Christian women's groups. They have attended workshops where strong, powerful women as well as oppressed women in the Bible are studied and analyzed; where Paul's and Jesus' teachings are discussed from the perspective of feminist theology; where leadership and skills training is provided; where they have learned about handling family communication and conflicts; where they have been able to discuss sexuality from a healthy Christian perspective; where they have talked about domestic violence and about mental health.

In these workshops they have shared their dreams, their fears and their concerns. Through role plays they have expressed their innermost feelings and they have learned to accept each other with their different gifts. It is through this work that they have grown both individually and as a group. But more of this work needs to take place and it needs to be more systematically developed.

Conclusions

Women in Nicaragua, especially Protestant women, are being abused heavily by their husbands. There are sociopolitical and cultural factors as well as personal factors involved, but their cries are largely being silenced. The church is one of the strongest promoters of this silence. What can be done?

James Poling, in his book *Deliver Us from Evil* suggests some responses people could have "to practice goodness" in a world of racial and gender evil. It seems our churches, in Nicaragua as well as in the United States and other countries, could contribute to facilitate these responses in their members: Develop a spirituality of resistance, live in solidarity with resistance communities, take moral and material inventory, confront the abuser within, confront other persons of power and negotiate with institutions.

In the book Poling wrote with Toinette Eugene, *Balm for Gilead*, 8 areas of the church's life are explored that could be instrumental for preventing and intervening in situations of violence. The proposed areas are: Use of the Bible in preaching, teaching and worship; work with children and youth; marriage preparation and weddings; women's and men's groups; programs with older adults; self-help groups; community outreach ministries and ethics for churches and pastoral leaders.

Aside from those, there are other challenges concerning domestic violence that the churches in Nicaragua are facing today:

- Prevention: Raising the self esteem of women and children; providing education on human sexuality and healthy family relations.
- Addressing the issue of domestic violence openly and honestly
- Revisiting and reinterpreting the Bible from the perspective of the survivor
- Publicizing the laws regarding domestic violence and information about where the victims can go for help.
- Providing funds and opportunities for counseling for survivors and perpetrators
- Developing its prophetic ministry concerning social injustice
- Appropriately challenge the culture of patriarchy with the message of the Gospel

When this is done the voices of the victims will not be silenced any more.

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**DE LA VIOLENCE CONTRE LES FEMMES ET LES ENFANTS
A L'EST DU RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO:
VERS UNE CULTURE DE LA PAIX**

Kavira Wangahemuka Julienne

Introduction

On ne peut parler des problèmes de l'Est du République Démocratique du Congo (RDC) sans les situer dans leur contexte élargi des troubles de la région des Grands Lacs. En effet, la région des Grands Lacs a fait couler beaucoup d'encre suite aux événements tragiques et aux cycles de violence qui sévissent dans cette région. Ces événements ont attiré l'attention du monde extérieur. Des milliers d'interventions et d'opérations d'assistance, de pacification et de réconciliation ont été et continuent à être déployées mais jusque-là n'ont pas réussi à mettre fin à la violence qui s'exerce particulièrement contre les femmes et les enfants. Les médias de tous bords ont montré l'intensité et l'atrocité de la violence régnant dans cette région. Différentes organisations internationales (ONG) ont été créées et descendent encore sur le terrain pour s'enquérir de la situation et dénoncer les violations des droits de la personne humaine que subissent les populations. Dans la plupart des décisions politiques pour la pacification, une lueur d'espoir a été entrevue mais la réalité sur le terrain dénote que la violence poursuit encore son bonhomme de chemin, surtout à l'Est du RDC.

La famille, cellule de base de toute nation, constituera le pivot de notre réflexion du fait qu'une culture de paix pourrait y être semée avant d'émerger dans toute la région.

En effet, les membres de la famille jouent différents rôles pour se maintenir et leurs efforts mis en commun contribuent à la survie de toute la société. En Afrique, le plus souvent, c'est l'homme qui jouait le rôle déterminant dans la gestion de la famille et de la société. Cependant, dans les crises actuelles que connaît la région et qui constituent l'objet de notre réflexion, il ressort que les décisions politiques des hommes et de quelques femmes ont été à la base de la destruction non seulement de la famille mais aussi de la société entière. De manière particulière, les femmes et les enfants, considérés à tort ou à raison comme couche faible de la société, damnés de la terre, sans force ni défense, ont été victimes de décisions irresponsables et arbitraires de la soi disant « couche forte de la société », les « détenteurs de pouvoir ».

Point n'est besoin de rappeler qu'une société sans femme ni enfants n'a jamais existé dans le cas contraire, elle ne serait qu'une pseudo-société. Et pourtant c'est la soi-disant couche faible qui détient en elle l'avenir de toute nation. Elle est par ailleurs, la catégorie des personnes qui sont le plus fragilisées par le poids de la violence barbare qui sévit dans la région. L'évaluation de la situation actuelle de la femme et des enfants dans la région des Grands Lacs en général et en particulier à l'Est du RDC constitue le moyen susceptible de mesurer la gravité de la dégradation de la vie dans cette société.

Ainsi, la question qui mérite d'attirer l'attention de tout observateur est de savoir si après beaucoup d'accords de pacification qui restent quelquefois lettre morte, la paix est possible ou s'il faut encore aller plus loin afin d'espérer à une société paisible. Il est pertinent de se demander quel avenir on peut espérer face à la fragilisation et à la destruction du soubassement même de la société, face à la gravité de ce cercle vicieux de violence.

Dans la région des Grands Lacs, la violence appelle la violence. Force est de constater que les victimes de crimes d'aujourd'hui sont prédisposés à commettre les mêmes exactions dans la famille et la société de demain faute d'un projet de société. C'est là que se situe la raison pour laquelle l'urgence s'impose pour que tout le peuple de la région soit éduqué à la culture de la paix afin d'éviter ce cycle de violence. Nous osons croire qu'une fois que chaque entité sociale dans la région assumera valablement sa mission on aboutira à la paix et à la rupture d'avec ce cycle de violence. C'est ainsi qu'André Karamaga est d'avis que si tous les génies de créativité et de

ténacité des humains mis au service de la violence et de la mort pouvaient être orientés au service de la vie, cette partie du continent, et pourquoi pas tout le continent, changerait de face facilement.²⁸

Ainsi, nous pouvons encore compter sur le rôle que les Eglises ainsi que les Institutions de formation théologique peuvent jouer, en collaboration avec le Conseil Oecuménique des Eglises, pour une culture de la paix dans cette région des Grands Lacs.

La réalité existentielle de la violence dans la région des Grands Lacs

La région des Grands Lacs est ainsi nommée parce qu'elle est située autour d'importants lacs, au cœur du continent africain. Dans ce travail, il ne s'agira pas de parler de tous les pays que couvre cette région, mais nous nous limiterons à la crise de l'Est du Congo-Kinshasa issue des événements qui sévissent au Burundi, au Rwanda ainsi qu'au RDC en général. Ces drames sont souvent le résultat de différents gouvernements dont les chefs étaient des dictateurs. Pour se maintenir au pouvoir, ceux-ci ont utilisé tous les moyens, jusqu'à exercer leur pouvoir par violence. La terreur a été une arme pour imposer leur autorité et asservir le peuple.

Aussi, pour déloger les dictatures, il y a eu une succession de guerres de libération. Ces violences n'ont fait que générer des cycles de violence. De nos jours les gouvernements exercent une nouvelle forme de dictature couverte par des notions de démocratie. Cette période néo-dictatoriale n'inspire pas confiance au peuple, en ce sens qu'elle est aussi teintée de violence. C'est une politique de « diviser pour mieux régner » dans laquelle la minorité et la majorité s'excluent réciproquement; les femmes et les enfants sont déshumanisés dans cette violence qui a atteint à leur égard son point culminant.

Cette violence généralisée frappe toutes les couches sociales et tous les domaines de la vie. Dans cette région, toutes les atteintes portées à la vie, à la dignité humaine, peuvent se nommer en termes d'injustice, de viol, d'injure, de moquerie, d'exclusion sous toutes ses formes. Tous ces piétinements de droits élémentaires conduisent à une banalisation de la vie. Cette activité de violence doit avoir une origine dans la nature humaine.

Source de violence dans la nature humaine

Il est indispensable de localiser les racines même de la violence avant de comprendre toutes ses pratiques. Pour apporter une paix durable dans la région, il faudrait à notre avis chercher les causes profondes qui sont à la base de ce cycle infernal de la violence qui s'exerce malgré les efforts politiques fournis par le monde international. Ceci permettrait de découvrir une dimension de la violence cachée en l'homme, c'est-à-dire la racine de toutes les pratiques violentes. Ainsi la violence se présente comme étant liée à la nature humaine. Pour expliquer ce phénomène, l'épître de Saint Jacques au chapitre 4, le verset 2 et suivant, présente l'origine de la violence en partant du vécu social pour arriver à un aspect abstrait et caché. Selon cette épître les conflits, les divisions ont leurs origines dans l'homme lui-même.

D'autres domaines de recherche ont essayé d'étudier ce phénomène de violence. Pour les psychologues, par exemple, la violence a une origine psychologique. C'est ainsi que Freud fait remonter l'origine de la violence au moment de la conception qu'il qualifie de « scène primitive ».²⁹ Quant aux biologistes, ils considèrent l'espèce humaine en tant qu'animal qui se reproduit selon les lois biologiques en ce sens que l'humain est combatif, à la moindre excitation, il déclenche son agression ou sa violence.³⁰

²⁸ Cf. A., KARAMAG A, « Mémoire et expérience de la violence » in *Service international de documentations judéo-chrétiennes (SIDIC)*, XXXVI, n°73, 2003, pp. 15-19.

²⁹ L., DALIGAND, « Les racines de la violence », in *Revue Réformée*, n°225-2003 pp., 25-38.

³⁰ R., ARON, *Paix et guerre entre nations*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1968, p. 339.

Nous sommes d'avis que la violence n'a rien à voir avec la génétique, mais comme le mentionne Lilian Daligand, la racine de la violence, c'est l'orgueil de l'homme qui se veut à sa propre origine, qui refuse par là même toute parole, c'est-à-dire toute adresse faite à un autre et toute réception de l'autre par lui.³¹ Ce faisant, loin d'être un problème biologique, la violence est d'abord un problème spirituel ensuite moral. Ainsi, l'orgueil empêche l'être humain de reconnaître Dieu comme son origine et l'autre comme son prochain. Il veut être créateur de soi-même; en développant le narcissisme, il privilégie ses satisfactions et veut soumettre tout le reste à sa domination. L'autre est transformé en ennemi condamné à subir la violence au profit d'un amour égoïste. Par le désir ardent de posséder, tous les moyens violents sont utilisés pourvu qu'il atteigne ses objectifs.

Force est d'affirmer que la violence réside non seulement dans les actes commis, mais que son origine est intérieure à l'homme. Il est ainsi en rébellion contre son créateur et contre ses semblables. Pour une paix durable au niveau des relations interhumaines; il faut d'abord la paix avec Dieu, puis avec soi-même et cette paix doit avoir des implications positives vis-à-vis de ses semblables et vis-à-vis de la nature. La violence a pris différentes formes dans la région des Grands Lacs parce que les cœurs des êtres humains en sont atteints.

La situation géographique de cette région et ses réalités socioculturelles font que la crise vécue dans l'un de ces pays soit communiquée ou partagée par tous les autres. Il y a une communication mutuelle ou internationale et les responsabilités sont partagées.

Le vécu de la violence à l'Est du Congo

La partie Est du (RDC) est éloignée de la capitale Kinshasa située à plus ou moins 2000 Km. à l'ouest. Cette partie est constituée par les provinces du Kivu et la province Orientale, l'ancien Haut-Zaïre. Elle est considérée comme une porte qui ouvre le (RDC) à tout le reste des pays des Grands Lacs. Ceci étant, l'Est du Congo a été un lieu de refuge pour les Rwandais Hutus et Tutsis selon qu'il y a eu conflits interethniques au Rwanda et au Burundi. L'Est du Congo particulièrement le Kivu a accueilli aussi la quasi-totalité des Rwandais après la guerre du Rwanda qui a débuté en octobre 1990 avant de culminer dans le génocide d'entre avril et juillet 1994.

Pendant longtemps, cette partie a été exposée à toute sorte de conflits qui se déroulaient dans ses Etats voisins où Hutus et Tutsis ont de liens avec leurs frères Congolais d'expression rwandaise. En effet, le constat qui ressort de ce fait permet d'affirmer que les Tutsis et/ou les Hutus du Rwanda ou du Burundi et ceux du Congo se soutiennent mutuellement lors qu'ils se sentent menacés et vice versa.

Aussi tout en n'insistant pas sur la crise multiforme d'avant le règne et du règne de l'ancien dictateur Mobutu sur l'Est du pays, nous constatons que cette partie du pays a été considérée comme une porte d'entrée pour toutes sortes de rebelles. Ses forêts, ses collines sont considérées comme un milieu propice pour les rebellions et ce sont les habitants qui en payent le prix.

Déjà pour déloger la dictature de Mobutu en 1996, Laurent Désiré Kabila avec ses alliés rwandais et ougandais commencèrent la guerre à partir l'Est. Ils ont eu à combattre contre des milices de réfugiés hutus, des rebelles burundais et les combattants nationalistes congolais Mai-Mai. Le peuple congolais était fatigué par la violence et l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme sous la dictature de Mobutu ; par les pillages systématiques et autres abus du pouvoir. Il a soutenu cette libération jusqu'à faire tomber la dictature. Depuis lors, les exactions militaires ne font qu'augmenter dans la région avec tout ce qu'elles comportent comme violence. La guerre de libération menée par Laurent Désiré Kabila suscite une autre guerre, car, dit-on, il n'a pas, dans l'exercice de son pouvoir, répondu aux attentes de tous, surtout à celles de ses alliés.

³¹ L., DALIGAND, Art.Cit., p.27.

Une deuxième guerre commença le deux août. 1998, au même lieu et avec les mêmes alliés rwandais, burundais et ougandais associés à certaines marionnettes congolaises. Cette guerre est qualifiée d'agression, car les grands meneurs viennent des pays voisins. Elle a suscité un esprit du nationalisme chez les Congolais qui ont essayé de constituer une résistance. En raison des prédateurs, ce mouvement rebelle connut plusieurs scissions ; les agresseurs se séparèrent ; car ils ne s'entendaient plus. Toutes leurs actions étaient imprégnées de violence à l'égard des populations : viol, vol et pillages des richesses congolaises. Leurs méfaits ont culminé dans une lutte entre eux à Kisangani, une ville très peuplée où ce sont les hommes ; les femmes et les enfants, autochtones qui en ont payé le prix.

La violence issue de ces guerres dites de « libération » sans succès, devint quotidienne. Elle plongea le peuple congolais dans une impasse et la peur du lendemain. Les gens sont exposés à n'importe quel charlatan qui leur promet la sécurité illusoire ! Trois ou quatre rebellions cohabitent simultanément dans un même pays et se livrent à différentes formes des pratiques violentes. Dans cette anarchie, les phénomènes de cannibalisme ont été enregistrés au Congo, spécialement au Nord et au Nord-Est du pays. Les groupes rebelles se sont nourris de la chair humaine de pauvres populations sans défense. Les rebelles ont également attisé les conflits entre les Lendus et les Hemas en Ituri, qui ont fait plus de 50.000 morts et plus de 500.000 déplacés³². Toute la région a connu et connaît encore un bain de sang. La vie humaine n'est plus sacrée comme elle l'était jadis en Afrique. Elle est devenue une banalité sacrifiée par les hommes en arme.

Notons que la participation massive de Rwandais dans les différentes guerres au Congo-Kinshasa, l'occupation et l'exploitation de richesses minières ; les relations et la coalition avec les Congolais d'expression rwandaise sont des raisons majeures qui ont attisé une haine viscérale des Congolais contre les Rwandais. Il est prévisible que la cohabitation pacifique de Congolais avec les Rwandais reste difficile, comme l'est actuellement celle des Hutus et des Tutsis. De tous ces cycles de violence, les femmes et les enfants sont ceux qui ont été les plus touchés.

Le calvaire de la femme

Si nous parlons spécifiquement du calvaire de la femme et non de l'homme, c'est parce que dans ce contexte de violences généralisées que nous venons de brosser ci-dessus, les deux catégories sociales (homme et femme) peuvent subir des atrocités qui conduisent à la mort ou au meurtre, mais la femme en subit plus, surtout dans les cas de viol.

En outre, la femme en Afrique est toujours exclue lors de la prise de grandes décisions qui engagent toute la société. Ainsi, elle semble être une victime innocente qui ignore toutes les motivations et les buts de ces différentes guerres. Nous insistons également sur la femme parce qu'elle est celle qui donne la vie, celle qui la donne voudrait la voir s'épanouir. Elle souffre de nouveaux « des douleurs d'enfantement » lorsque cette vie est menacée par de multiples oppressions. La violence subie par les femmes à l'Est du Congo revêt de multiples facettes. Celles qui apparaissent au premier plan sont les tueries ; les viols ; les vols et les pillages.

Les vols et les pillages du patrimoine familial

En effet, toutes les interminables guerres ont engendré le dépouillement des peuples de tous leurs projets de société et ont détruit beaucoup d'infrastructures ainsi que l'économie. Alors que les hommes rendus chômeurs n'ont plus la possibilité de travailler, ni de sortir pour se ravitailler ; dans ce chaos la femme congolaise au contraire a fait preuve de bravoure. Elle a réussi à préserver la survie de sa famille avec le risque de la rencontre des rebelles, en ce sens qu'en sortant, sa route était parsemée de tous dangers de viol ou de mort. Or si elle n'affronte pas ce risque, sa famille rescapée court le danger de mort, non de l'épée, mais de la famine.

³² Cf. *Der Fischer Weltalmanach 2004 : Zahlen Daten Fakten*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Oktober 2003, pp.501-502 et *Amnesty International Jahresbericht 2003*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, pp.322-330.

Par ailleurs, cette femme continue à faire de l'agriculture et de l'élevage de petit bétail et se rend dans les forêts à la recherche de bois de chauffage et de charbons.

Il s'avère nécessaire de dire que les rebelles comme les miliciens emportent tous ceux qu'ils trouvent sur leur passage. Ils pillent les champs, l'élevage, même les semences en germination sont par fois arrachées et détruites. Ainsi un paradoxe apparaît dans le vécu quotidien de la femme congolaise : au lieu d'être libérée de l'oppression, elle est dépouillée de son espérance de la vie. La vie de toute la société ainsi que celle de la famille est donc mise en danger. Dans cette partie du RDC si quelqu'un(une) a échappé à l'épée ou à la balle, il(elle) est par contre victime de la famine.

Ici rien n'est plus poignant pour la femme que de voir la vie qu'elle donne au monde s'évanouir et périr. Ainsi son désir profond de voir les siens survivre au prix même de sa vie. Enfin cette situation de chaos total a déjà rendu plusieurs femmes de cette région non seulement malades mais aussi traumatisées à la suite aux dépouillements systématiques de leurs avoirs et des projets qui leurs servaient pour le maintien de la vie familiale.

Alors que la guerre est déclarée officiellement terminée, la femme de l'Est du Congo vit encore dans l'incertitude du fait qu'elle reste toujours exposée à la mort si pas au viol, elle vit avec la peur du lendemain.

La femme comme victime de la violence sexuelle

Pendant une période de crise politique, les hommes ne tardent pas à prendre les armes pour démontrer ce dont ils sont capables ! Les plus forts tuent et éliminent les faibles ou les réduisent en esclaves. Au-delà de l'arme à feu, le sexe est utilisé pour démontrer la force phallique qui écrase et anéantit les femmes et les jeunes filles. Dans les régions de l'Est du RDC, les grands-mères ont été violées, les mères, les filles, même les petites depuis l'âge de quatre ans. Ainsi les pratiques de viol apparaissent comme faisant partie de la loi de la guerre, alors qu'il s'agit des abus, des vices communément appelés «crimes de guerre». Cette situation accompagne presque toutes les guerres au monde, mais ce calvaire qui a été imposé et qu'ont vécu les femmes de l'Est du RDC est inimaginable à cause de son intensité et de sa perversité.

En effet, la guerre qu'a connu le RDC depuis le deux août 1998 jusqu'en 2003, selon les rapports des organisations humanitaires qui travaillent dans la région, a fait plus de 8.000 cas de viols dans la seule province du Sud Kivu. Mais il est vraisemblable, selon les mêmes sources que le nombre véritable de viols soit bien plus élevé car beaucoup de femmes, craignant l'ostracisme, taisent les viols dont elles ont été victimes.

Dans la province du Nord-Kivu par exemple, le service médical de l'Organisation non gouvernementale «*Refuge pour femmes violées* » signale que, deux ans après l'éruption volcanique sur la ville de Goma, ils ont déjà recensé plus de 150 femmes victimes de violences sexuelles qui sont soignées et hospitalisées dans leurs services médicaux. Toutefois cette ONG souligne qu'il y a une forte probabilité, «d'ici fin janvier 2004, que le centre en accueille le double, voire plus, étant donné l'accès facile à des localités autrefois fermées aux humanitaires», a expliqué le directeur du centre le Dr Kalume³³. Selon son rapport, l'ONG américaine «doctors on call for service» (DOCS), installée à Goma depuis 1999 souligne qu'ils ont déjà traité plus de 1.500 femmes avec le soutien du Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'Enfance, l'Unicef. La plupart des victimes viennent des régions de Masisi et Walikale, (à une centaine de kilomètres au nord de Goma) précise encore Dr Kalume.

Pour étayer nos propos voici certains témoignages au sujet des femmes victimes de viol : Le Pasteur Nabino qui suit ces victimes témoigne : « L'hôpital de Panzi est l'un des milieux sanitaires dans la ville de Bukavu qui essaient d'accueillir ces victimes pour des soins urgents [...] Elles sont des milliers dont les conditions de vie sont déplorables. Elles témoignent avoir été violées par une dizaine de militaires pour certaines. Aucune n'a été violée par un seul militaire. Ce qui choque, c'est

³³ Dr Jacques Kalume, gynécologue obstétricien du Centre pour refuge de femmes violées, interviewé sur téléphone, Goma, 23.12.2003.

que lorsque ces insensés terminent de les violer, ils enfoncent pour certaines des troncs d'arbres à l'intérieur de leurs organes génitaux ou donnent des coups de fusils. C'est une cruauté insupportable. Les unes demeurent paralysées car leurs organes génitaux sont désormais détruits. La plupart sont infectées par le VIH/SIDA. Leurs âges varient entre 10 et 80 ans³⁴.

Dans la région du Sud-Kivu, dans le territoire de Mwenga, à environ 150 Km. au sud de la ville de Bukavu, le viol a pris une telle ampleur qu'on a commencé à «purifier» les victimes plutôt que de les répudier, par le biais d'un rite utilisé en temps normal pour les femmes coupables d'adultère, selon Gertrude Mudekereza³⁵. La même source explique que, dans ce territoire, ce crime a été commis au point que toutes les femmes et toutes les filles ont été violées. « Dans un premier temps, les hommes ont répudié leurs femmes et puis, quand ils se sont rendus compte qu'il faudrait répudier toutes les femmes sans exception, ils ont commencé des rites de purification», poursuit-elle.

Ces crimes ne font pas seulement honte aux femmes congolaises, mais à tous ceux qui détiennent une parcelle de pouvoir dans ce monde et sont capables de dire halte à la barbarie !

Cette violence contre les femmes s'est intensifiée lors de la deuxième guerre d'agression contre le Congo-Kinshasa. On dirait que cette guerre a favorisé la violence qui s'est traduite en pratique quotidienne avant de prendre la forme de perversion. Malgré tout les efforts de paix, cette violence continue son bonhomme de chemin. Cette perversité a été décrite par un observateur en ces termes :

Depuis ce début d'année, les violences sexuelles sont exercées selon des rites si fréquents qu'ils en deviennent presque des normes. Plusieurs hommes violent une femme et à plusieurs reprises. Le mari est ligoté dans la case, les enfants y sont amenés : tous sont contraints d'être présents(...) De plus, les assaillants forcent à des incestes entre père et filles ou frères et sœurs. Ils vont jusqu'à sodomiser des hommes, une pratique absolument inconcevable dans les campagnes africaines, même lors de relations sexuelles librement consenties³⁶.

En Afrique la sexualité reste un tabou : elle ne peut jamais être pratiquée publiquement, plus grave encore devant ses propres enfants. Les mœurs sont inversées. Ces enfants sont choqués et blessés intérieurement. Ils apprennent par-là à démystifier tout ce qui est culturel ou même à développer une haine viscérale contre tous ceux qui se sont rendus coupables de viols de leur «mères».

Il faut noter qu'une femme violée n'a plus d'existence sociale. Même si elle continue à vivre, elle est traumatisée non seulement physiquement, mais aussi psychologiquement. Elle est ainsi malade et par conséquent mérite des soins particuliers. En plus des soins de la santé physique, il faut noter ce que la psychothérapeute Susan Sturdivant nomme la thérapie féministe qui est de soulager la femme des pratiques destructrices subies. Les femmes ont été malmenées, diminuées, ravalées, il faut alors qu'elles soient ramassées³⁷.

Ceux qui commettent ces atrocités ne se rendent pas compte du prix physique et psychologique que coûtent ces actions ignobles. Culturellement l'inceste est prohibé en Afrique. Au cas où il est commis, il est sanctionné selon la coutume. Ce qui est dommage, est que certains de ceux qui commettent ces crimes, parviennent même à exécuter certaines victimes prétendant qu'ils leur épargnent la honte et le traumatisme.

Dans certains cas, les femmes violées sont condamnées à vivre dans l'isolement. Par cette violence, l'humanisme africain est passé au crible, il a été trahi par ces pratiques inhumaines. Le respect qui était dû à celle qui donne la vie est foulé au pied. La notion de la pudeur est ainsi mise

³⁴ Barhamanya Nabino, Pasteur de la CEPAC/Bukavu, interviewé au sujet de cas de viols internés dans l'hôpital, le 23.12.2003.

³⁵ Gertrude Mudekereza, travail pour le compte des femmes victimes des violences sexuelles, interviewée à Bukavu, le 10 Décembre 2003

³⁶ Le nouvel observateur in L'hebdomadaire le coulisse, n° 2027, Sept. 2003.

³⁷ S., STURDIVANT, *Les femmes et la psychothérapie, une philosophie féministe du traitement*, New York, Springer Publishing Compagny, 1980, p.9.

en cause, les tabous et les interdits sont dévoilés au vu de tous. La violence détient le droit de vie ou de mort sur les femmes et les jeunes filles en qui la nation met son espoir.

Conséquence de la violence de la femme

Les femmes au RDC ont pris le rôle des hommes pour faire vivre leur famille, parce que les hommes ont été mis en chômage et les autres ont été enrôlés de force dans le mouvement rebelles. Face à cette situation, les femmes congolaises n'ont pas croisé les bras. Elles sont restées en général fortes selon les mots de Karin Wachter, qui dirige un programme de l'international Rescue Committee. Cette dernière souligne que ce courage est prouvé par le fait qu'elles réclament en priorité des houes, des semences et des casseroles³⁸.

Face aux violences sexuelles, ces femmes ont contracté des maladies sexuellement transmissibles et le SIDA. La prévalence du SIDA parmi tous les militaires présents dans la région était estimée à 60%. Il faut noter que certains criminels de droit commun et des bandits opportunistes ont profité du climat d'impunité généralisée pour perpétrer la violence contre les femmes et les jeunes filles³⁹.

Certaines femmes et filles étaient détenues comme des esclaves sexuelles et domestiques. Elles ont actuellement des grossesses indésirables avec tout ce que celles-ci comportent comme risques. D'autres encore, une fois violées, ne peuvent plus être acceptées au foyer, elles sont répudiées par leur mari. Suite à cette exclusion sociale, certaines ont préféré taire leurs sorts et par conséquent n'ont pu eu à se faire soigner, ainsi elles sont candidates à la mort due aux multiples tortures et aux maladies sexuellement transmissibles.

Ces femmes déshumanisées, chosifiées et annihilées vivent au quotidien sans vivre pleinement. Elles souffrent non seulement physiquement, mais aussi psychologiquement et moralement. Quand bien même elles reçoivent quelques traitements physiologiques, une assistance sociale ou matérielle, elles sont encore malades. Leurs souffrances, leurs peines valent celles de toute la société. Blessées dans leur amour-propre, elles gardent un mauvais souvenir de leurs bourreaux. Si l'occasion se présente, elles sont prédisposées à se venger. Cette situation a une implication néfaste sur les enfants de la région.

Les enfants victimes de la violence à l'Est du RDC

Une société sans enfants ni jeunes est sans avenir. L'Est du Congo a un grand nombre d'enfants, garçons et filles, une jeunesse florissante dans laquelle repose l'espoir de la nation. La violence qui a été commise à leur égard découle d'une part de la guerre elle-même et d'autre part les conséquences de la violence subit par les femmes, leurs mères. Dans ce premier cas, les enfants de moins de 17 ans ont été recrutés dans des milices et des forces armées contrairement à la convention de Genève relative aux droits des enfants. La spécificité de l'Est du Congo est que ce sont les moins âgés, encore sous la dépendance totale de leurs parents qui sont recrutés et communément appelés «kadogo». Ils ont été arrachés de force aux mains de leurs parents ou dans les écoles. Ils ont été emmenés dans les forêts pour une formation militaire. Ceux qui n'arrivent pas à s'adapter à la formation meurent à l'insu de leurs parents. Lors des combats, certains enfants d'une même famille, recrutés par différents groupes antagonistes, se sont vus s'affronter !

En effet, bien que la guerre ait pris fin officiellement selon les accords de Pretoria, ou que certains enfants rescapés soient démobilisés et rendus de nouveau à leurs familles, ils sont devenus dangereux non seulement entre eux, mais aussi pour leurs familles et pour toute la société, suite à une éducation ratée. Ainsi un observateur attentif conclurait qu'au Congo-Kinshasa, l'intention première des agresseurs en s'en prenant aux enfants, force et avenir du pays, était d'anéantir ou effondrer l'avenir de ce pays.

Dans le second cas, les enfants sont victimes de la violence que subissent leurs mères. Pour Daligand, la naissance, sortie difficile du nid premier, est l'expérience quasi initiale de la violence.

³⁸ Cf. Human Right Program, La guerre dans la guerre, juin 2002.

³⁹ Ibidem

Elle est violence d'autant plus qu'elle est abandon d'un monde ou tout était donné sans avoir à l'acquérir (la nourriture, la chaleur, etc.). Déjà à peine sorti, ses yeux sont frappés par la lumière, l'oreille par les bruits, la peau mordue par le froid autant de sensation d'agression. A ce moment l'enfant est sans défense, n'ayant pas encore de mots pour s'exprimer⁴⁰.

Dans le cadre de la violence faite aux enfants à l'Est du Congo, nous remonterons plus loin que Daligand qui s'est basé sur l'expérience de la naissance de l'enfant. Déjà au sein de sa mère l'enfant sait communiquer et suivre tous les mouvements, les humeurs et les sentiments de sa mère. Or ces femmes enceintes, victimes de la violence sous toutes ses formes sont intimidées, terrorisées, surprises par les coups de cartouches ou de bombes à tout moment. Le cauchemar du viol et de la mort est toujours imminent. A ce stade, ces pauvres bébés partagent déjà la violence avec leurs mères. Les psychiatres d'adultes ont souvent remarqué que l'étape fœtale de la vie est toujours agissante, car on aperçoit ses traces vitalisantes ou dévitalisantes lors des épreuves vécues. Aussi les psychanalystes des enfants voient notamment des enfants psychotiques dont la maladie mentale semble être due à un handicap vital ou sexuel causé par un traumatisme émotionnel et symbolique très grave durant la vie intra-utérine⁴¹. Avec des études psychanalytiques, on arriverait à comprendre que la violence à l'Est du Congo est totale, car elle n'a épargné personne, même pas les fœtus, et tous les milliers d'enfants nés sous cette crise en sont atteints.

Après sa naissance, l'enfant a besoin de la chaleur parentale. Il a droit à la vie et tous les soins y afférents. Tous ses droits sont des devoirs pour les parents, mais compte tenu de la situation que nous avons décrit, la famille est démantelée, seule la femme occupe la place de l'entretien du foyer au prix de sa vie. Cet échec de ne pas satisfaire au besoins des enfants est une violence qui leurs est imposée et a des conséquences graves sur leur évolution physique, psychique, voire morale.

Conséquences de la violence contre les enfants

Beaucoup d'enfants ont été conçus, sont nés et grandissent dans un contexte de violence : ils subissent et assistent aux multiples scènes de violence infligées à leurs parents. Ils constituent une génération sacrifiée car, à force de subir la violence, on s'arroge le droit de se défendre soi-même violemment et perpétrer ainsi la violence.

La violence a entraîné une irresponsabilité chez les parents, qui, une fois subie par les enfants, les amène à devenir des enfants de la rue, des voyous et des délinquants. Les enfants constituent ainsi une bande de violents, des voleurs. Cette catégorie est communément appelée dans cette région «maibobo». Leurs attitudes et leurs réactions agressives montrent à quel niveau la violence détourne les forces vives d'une société pour son autodestruction.

S'agissant des enfants de la rue Euchariste Paulhus donne deux catégorisations. D'après lui, il y a des enfants de la rue qui deviennent délinquants, parce que forcés par la vie et les circonstances de se trouver dans la rue. Il y a aussi des jeunes qui choisissent la rue parce qu'ils sont déjà délinquants dans leur mentalité : jeunes dont la structure mentale, antisociale s'est inscrite dans le développement des premières années de vie. Les premiers sont directement victimes de structures sociopolitiques injustes tandis que les seconds sont victimes du manque d'amour du plus proche⁴².

Ces deux types d'enfants sont présents dans l'Est du RDC. La violence frappe directement les enfants et les arrache à la famille pour les drainer dans les rues. La violence, de plus, n'offre aucune occasion à la femme de témoigner correctement à ses enfants ou au fœtus qui est dans son sein son affection maternelle. De la vie intra-utérine à la naissance, la violence ne produit que traumatisme et douleur qui empêchent l'expression de l'amour envers la personne de l'enfant. Le manque d'amour peut être à l'origine de la délinquance qui conduit à la drogue, à la prostitution.

⁴⁰ L., DALIGAND, Art.Cit., p.22.

⁴¹ Françoise DOLTO, *Sexualité féminité, libido, érotisme, frigidity*, 2^{ème} éd., Paris, Scarabée et Compagnie, 1982, p. 50.

⁴² cf. E., PAULHUS, *Enfants à risque*, Collection pédagogique psychosociale, Paris, éd. Fleurus, 1990, p. 83.

La situation des femmes comme celle des enfants à l'Est du RDC mérite d'attirer l'attention de toute personne soucieuse d'un avenir meilleur de l'humanité en général, de la région des Grands Lacs en particulier. Les enfants comme leurs mères sont sans forces, ni pouvoir et pourtant ce sont eux l'avenir et la survie de la société. Nous sommes d'avis que si la femme n'éduque pas l'enfant à la paix dans le contexte de cette région, il y a un risque que ces enfants grandissent dans la haine de tous ceux qui les ont agressés et qui se sont rendus coupables de crimes contre la personne. Ainsi la cohabitation pacifique serait hypothéquée sur plusieurs générations à venir. La femme est astreinte à assumer valablement sa mission car elle a reçu dans la culture africaine le rôle de la garante, c'est elle qui transmet l'éducation de génération à l'autre.

En égard à ce qui précède, il s'avère important de dire que les interventions du monde politique pour la pacification sont de grande importance dans la région. Néanmoins, elles n'arriveront pas à panser les cœurs qui sont le siège de la violence, ni à ôter la haine des bourreaux qui ont imposé une misère endémique et délibérée aux peuples congolais. Voilà qui justifie la mise en place d'une éducation à la culture de la paix au sein de nos familles restreintes comme au sein des communautés ecclésiastiques.

Vers une culture de la paix

Vu l'ampleur de la violence à l'Est du RDC et tous les risques que court l'avenir de cette société, l'éducation à la paix s'impose non seulement en famille, mais aussi aux éducateurs dans les écoles maternelles, primaires, secondaires et universitaires, dans les aumôneries des militaires, des prisons et des hôpitaux.

Nous sommes convaincus que mobiliser les énergies orientées au service de la violence et de la mort vers la vie et la paix ne relève pas seulement du pouvoir politique mais bien plus du rôle de l'Eglise. Celle-ci a reçu de la part de son chef, le Christ une mission de réconciliation (2 Cor5:18-21) et de faire des artisans de paix car le Christ est lui-même le Prince de paix. Cette réconciliation du peuple ne sera possible que si chacun est réconcilié d'abord avec Dieu, puis avec lui-même et en fin avec son prochain. Ceci étant, le Conseil Oecuménique des Eglises cherche à réaliser sa mission de catalyseur de paix au travers de l'éducation théologique. Il veut équiper les serviteurs des Eglises oeuvrant sur le terrain, et leur fournir les informations nécessaires en vue de l'émergence de la culture de la paix dans un monde où la région des pays des Grands Lacs ne ferait pas exception.

Au sujet de la culture de la paix nous paraphrasons à juste titre le cardinal G. Danneels, faisant suite à la pensée du pape Jean XXIII, qui dit que la culture de la paix ne dépend pas tellement des structures ; même si celles-ci sont supposées, mais bien plus des personnes. A côté d'une structure juste, dit-il, ce sont les innombrables gestes de paix entre individus et entre états qui créent une sorte de culture de paix⁴³. L'éducation à la culture de la paix ne s'occupe pas seulement des agresseurs mais aussi des opprimés. Dans le cas des Grands Lacs, la femme et les enfants victimes de la barbarie sont exposés à développer pour l'avenir soit la violence comme mécanisme de vengeance de tous les coups subis, soit la culture de la paix, selon qu'ils seront amenés ou non à assumer tous les traumatismes des violences actuelles.

D'une manière particulière, les institutions de formation théologique et les Eglises doivent s'impliquer dans la recherche d'une paix durable en vue de contrecarrer le cycle de violence toujours imminent dans la région.

Notons qu'il y a déjà plusieurs tentatives de pacification : au niveau politique, des accords ont été signés, des dialogues ont été entrepris ; mais nous sommes d'avis que ces approches risquent de procurer une sécurité illusoire plutôt que la paix. Nous restons sceptiques sur la possibilité de trouver un policier pour chaque personne, c'est pourquoi, nous jugeons utile l'éducation du peuple à une culture de paix. Nous avons vu que la violence est un problème qui émane du cœur de la personne.

⁴³ Cf. G. DANNIELS, «Religion et paix » in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, n° 125,2003, pp., 529-539, p. 532.

Pour rétablir la paix là où la violence a systématiquement tout ravagé, il ne s'agira pas seulement d'organiser des structures sociopolitiques, mais aussi et surtout de chercher à déloger la violence du cœur de la personne

Cette tâche est moins l'apanage de la politique ou de l'économique, c'est la mission des Eglises et de la famille comme cellule de la nation et de tout autre secteur d'éducation. Pour plus d'efficacité, cette mission devra tenir compte de tous les aspects de la lutte et de la prévention contre la violence. Les agresseurs comme les victimes doivent être suivis, en stigmatisant les actions violentes dans le souci d'amener les deux groupes à faire la paix et les actions justes. En plus, cette mission devra s'appliquer d'une part à la thérapie en vue de la guérison de la femme et de l'enfant, tous traumatisés par la violence. Et d'autre part à prendre des dispositions pour les enfants qui doivent naître afin de les préserver de la violence et ainsi rompre avec ce cycle. Pour Paulhus, les valeurs spirituelles et morales coexistent avec les approches analytiques, l'éducation de la foi elle-même s'inscrivant dans le mouvement thérapeutique⁴⁴. Sans cette dimension de l'éducation à la paix la vraie réconciliation avec les bourreaux est pratiquement impossible.

Tout en reconnaissant les actions réalisées jusqu'ici par les organisations non gouvernementales, l'Eglise, pour sa part, apportera sa contribution non négligeable dans cette grande mission de la paix. Elle occupe une bonne place pour la sensibilisation à la pratique de la paix, car elle est encore le lieu qui rassemble un grand nombre de la population en Afrique.

Dans cette lutte contre la violence, on a besoin d'un changement fondamental de conscience. Au nom du conseil œcuménique des Eglises, Konrad Raiser, en tant que secrétaire général déclare :

« Nous devons renoncer à être des spectateurs de la violence ou s'en lamenter et devenir actifs pour vaincre la violence dans et hors les murs de notre Eglise. Nous devons nous souvenir, et de même nos Eglises, de notre responsabilité commune de parler fortement contre toute défense des structures injustes et oppressives, contre l'usage de la violence ainsi que les violations graves des Droits de l'homme commis au nom d'une nation ou d'un groupe ethnique »⁴⁵.

Par ces mots, Raiser souligne l'urgence et la pertinence de la mission de l'Eglise dans ce monde plein de violence. La question de la paix ou de vaincre la violence n'est pas seulement de l'ordre de la théorie, mais bien plus de la pratique. Ainsi dans l'éducation à la paix, les institutions impliquées doivent être les lieux de la pratique même de la paix et de la justice.

Nous insistons sur le rôle des institutions de formation théologique et les Eglises, parce que tous les responsables des Eglises qui ont à parler aux populations dans la région passent par la formation théologique. Il faudrait à notre avis une forte sensibilisation de tous côtés, car cette paix se constitue par une pratique collective ou chacun doit apporter sa pierre de construction. Ce serait une grande et pertinente entreprise si tous les domaines religieux au niveau des institutions théologiques et des Eglises locales formaient un réseau dans toute la région des Grands Lacs pour leur mission commune de faire une éducation à la paix, en misant sur les relations au niveau régional, continental et international. Il importe d'investir dans l'éducation de la femme et de l'enfant qui constituent l'avenir de toute la région.

⁴⁴ E. Paulhus, *Op. Cit.*, p.251.

⁴⁵ Konrad RAISER, *Une culture de la vie. Transformer la globalisation et la violence*, Genève / Paris, Conseil Oecuménique des Eglises/Cerf, 2003, p. 106.

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**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN
IN EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)
MOVING TOWARDS A CULTURE OF PEACE**

Julienne Kavira Wangahemuka

Introduction

It is impossible to talk about the problems in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) without setting them in the wider context of the troubles in the Great Lakes region. A great deal has been written about the Great Lakes region following the tragic events that have taken place there and the recurring cycles of violence. These events caught the attention of the outside world. There have been literally thousands of interventions and relief operations, and efforts to bring peace and reconciliation continue, but so far none of these has succeeded in putting an end to the violence which is affecting women and children in particular. The media of every kind have broadcasted the extreme violence and atrocities taking place in this region around the world. Various international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been set up and are still present in the field, investigating the situation and denouncing the human rights violations to which the population is subjected. Most of the political decisions aimed at bringing peace seemed to hold out a glimmer of hope but the reality on the ground shows that the violence is still continuing unabated, especially in eastern DRC.

In this paper, I shall be focussing on the family, the nucleus of every society and nation, because it could be possible to sow the seeds of a culture of peace in the family that would impact the region. Family members play different roles in maintaining the family and together their efforts help to ensure the survival of the whole society. In Africa, it has generally been the man who took the decisions in running the family and society. However, in the present crises affecting the region, it is clear that the political decisions taken by men (and a few women) have basically destroyed not only the family but the whole of society. In particular, women and children, considered rightly or wrongly to be the weakest section of society, the damned of the earth, helpless and defenceless, have been the victims of irresponsible and arbitrary decisions taken by the supposedly “strong” section of society, those who “hold power”.

I hardly need to remind us that there can be no such thing as a real society without women and children. Yet it is this supposedly weak segment that represents the future of any nation. At the same time, they are the group of people who are most vulnerable and who have borne the brunt of the barbaric violence raging in this region. Our evaluation of the present situation of women in the Great Lakes region in general and the east DRC in particular, will show just how badly life has degenerated in this society.

The question any observer has to consider is whether, after all the peace-making agreements, many of which have been stillborn, peace is possible and how much further we have to go before we can hope for a peaceful society. It is appropriate to ask what kind of future we can expect when the very foundations of society have been so badly undermined and destroyed, and given the seriousness of the vicious circle of violence.

In the Great Lakes region, violence breeds violence. We cannot deny that the victims of today’s crimes are probably destined to commit the same exactions in the families and society of tomorrow, for lack of any project for society. This is what makes it so urgent for all the people of the region to be educated for a culture of peace in order to avoid this spiral of violence. We dare to hope that once every social entity in the region is able to fulfil its mission as it should, peace will come about and we will be able to break the cycle of violence. As André Karamaga believes, if only all the human creative genius and tenacity that are being poured into the service of violence and death could be directed into serving life, then the face of this part of our continent - and, why not, our

whole continent – could easily change.⁴⁶ So we count on the churches and theological training institutions, in cooperation with the World Council of Churches, to play their part in working for a culture of peace in the Great Lakes region.

The reality of living with violence in the Great Lakes region

The Great Lakes region takes its name from its situation around a number of large lakes at the heart of the African continent. This presentation will not cover all the countries in the region, but will confine itself to the crisis in the eastern DRC arising out of the events which have shaken Burundi and Rwanda as well as the whole of DRC. These tragedies were often brought about by the governments headed by dictators and determined to keep themselves in power whatever the cost, even if it meant using violence and imposing their authority and subjugating their people by a reign of terror.

At the same time, in order to get rid of these dictatorships, a series of liberation wars were mounted, so that violence simply generated more violence. Today, the governments exercise a new form of dictatorship disguised under the trappings of democracy. The people have no confidence in this period of neo-dictatorship, in that it is also tainted by violence. This is a policy of “divide and rule”, in which the minority and the majority mutually reject one another; women and children are dehumanized in this violence which, for them, has reached new heights.

The violence is generalized and affects all levels of society and all aspects of life. In this region every kind of attack on human life and dignity can be found: injustice, rape, physical and verbal abuse, mockery, exclusion in all its forms. Human life is held cheap when basic rights are trodden underfoot.. All this violence must have its origin somewhere in human nature.

Human nature as the source of violence

It is essential to identify the real roots of the violence if we are to understand all that it means in practice. If we are to bring lasting peace to the region we must, I believe, look for the underlying causes that are behind this infernal spiral of violence that continues despite all the political efforts of the international community. As we do so, we will discover a hidden dimension of violence in human beings, which is the root of all violent actions. So violence can be seen as part of human nature. The Epistle of James, chapter 4: 2 explains this phenomenon, presenting the origin of violence, starting from everyday social life and moving on to an abstract, hidden aspect. According to this Epistle, divisions have their origin in human beings themselves.

Other areas of research have tried to examine this phenomenon of violence. Psychologists, for example, consider that the origins of violence are psychological. Freud traces the origin of violence to the moment of conception, which he describes as the “primitive scene”⁴⁷. Biologists, on the other hand, consider the human species as animals their reproduce according to biological laws. As such, the human being is ready to fight and will respond to the slightest provocation with aggressiveness or violence⁴⁸

In my view, violence is not a matter of genetics; rather, as Lillian Daligand has said, the root of violence is human pride. Human beings want to see themselves as being their own originators. For this reason human beings refuse to speak, that is, they refuse to address others and to be accepted by others.⁴⁹ This being so, far from being a biological problem, violence is first of all a spiritual problem and thereafter, a moral one. Pride prevents a human being from acknowledging God as our origin and others as our neighbours. The human wants to be his or her own creator; by developing narcissism, priority is given to satisfying one’s own desires and efforts are made to subject the rest of the world to one individual’s will. The other becomes her or his enemy,

⁴⁶ Cf. A. Karamaga, « Mémoire et expérience de la violence » in *Service international de documentations judéo-chrétiennes (SIDIC)*, XXXVI, no. 73, 2003, pp. 15-19

⁴⁷ L. Dalligand, « Les racines de la violence » in *Revue Réformée*, no. 225-2003, pp. 25-38.

⁴⁸ R. Aron, *Paix et guerre entre nations*, Paris, Calman-Lévy, 1968, p. 339.

⁴⁹ L. Daligand, Art.cit., p.27.

condemned to endure this violence, feeding this egotistical self-love. So ardent is the desire to possess that any means are used, however violent, provided they achieve their ends.

Violence, then, is not just contained in the acts committed, but originates within the human being. The human being is in rebellion against the creator and against fellow human beings. If there is to be lasting peace in relations between human beings, they first have to be at peace with God, then with themselves. This peace will then have positive repercussions in relations with their fellow human beings and with nature. The violence in the Great Lakes region has occurred in so many different forms because it has taken hold of human hearts.

The geographical situation and the socio-cultural realities of this region are such that a crisis in any one of the countries here is transmitted to or shared by all the others. They are interconnected among themselves and internationally, and responsibilities are shared.

The day to day reality of the violence in eastern DRC

Eastern DRC is far away from the capital Kinshasa, which lies some 2000 kilometres to the west. It comprises the provinces of Kivu and the former Upper Zaire, now the Eastern Province, and may be regarded as DRC's doorway to the rest of the Great Lakes region. This being so, eastern DRC has been the place of refuge for the Hutu and Tutsi refugees from Rwanda and Burundi whenever there was interethnic conflicts in either of those two countries. Eastern DRC, and above all Kivu, took in almost all of the Rwandans after the war in Rwanda that started in October 1990 before culminating in the genocide of April-July 1994.

This part of the country has long been exposed to the conflicts of one kind or another taking place in its neighbouring countries, where Hutu and Tutsi have ties with their Rwandan-speaking Congolese kinsfolk. All in all, it is fair to say that the Tutsi and/or the Hutu of Rwanda or Burundi and those in the DRC support one another whenever the one or the other feels threatened.

Thus, without dwelling on the multiple crises affecting the east of the country before and during the regime of the former dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, we can say that this part of the country has been used as an entry point by all kinds of rebels. Its forests and hills make it ideal terrain for rebels and its inhabitants have paid the price.

It was from the east that in 1996, Laurent Désiré Kabila with his Rwandan and Ugandan allies started the war to overthrow Mobutu dictatorship. They found themselves fighting against Hutu refugee militias, Burundi rebels and Congolese nationalist Mai-Mai fighters. The Congolese people were tired of the violence and human exploitation under the Mobutu dictatorship, with its systematic pillaging and other abuses of power. They supported this war of liberation until the dictatorship was overthrown. Since then, exactions by the military in the region have simply gone on increasing, with all the violence they imply. The war of liberation led by Laurent Désiré Kabila has engendered another war, because people say that in exercising power he did not live up to the expectations of all of his allies, not least the women.

A second war started on 2nd August 1998, in the same place and with the same Rwandan, Burundian and Ugandan allies working together with certain Congolese puppets. This war was described as a war of aggression because the main movers came from the neighbouring countries. This roused a feeling of nationalism among the Congolese people who tried to offer resistance. Various rifts began to appear in this rebel movement over the spoils; the aggressors went their separate ways because they could no longer agree. All their actions were marked by violence against the population: rape, theft and pillaging of Congolese resources. Their disagreements culminated in a fight-out amongst them at Kisangani, a densely populated town, where it was the local men, women and children who paid the price.

The violence engendered by these unsuccessful so-called "wars of liberation" became part of everyday life. It filled the Congolese people with fear of the future and plunged them into an

impasse from which they see no exit. People are at the mercy of any and every charlatan promising the illusion of security. Three or four rebel movements live side by side in the same country, engaging in different forms of violence. In the midst of this chaos, there have even been reports of cannibalism in the Congo, notably in the north and north east of the country. The rebel groups have fed on the human flesh of poor, defenceless people. The rebels have also fuelled the conflicts between the Lendu and the Hema in Ituri, which have left more than 50,000 dead and more than 500,000 people displaced.⁵⁰ The whole region has gone through a blood-bath, and it is still continuing. Human life is no longer sacred, as it once was in Africa. It has come to be held cheap, easily sacrificed by those who take up arms.

It must be said that the large-scale involvement of Rwandans in the different wars in DRC, their occupation of the country and exploitation of its mineral resources, their relations and coalitions with Rwandan-speaking Congolese are major reasons fuelling a gut hatred of Rwandans among the Congolese people. It seems likely that peaceful coexistence between the Congolese and the Rwandan people will remain difficult, as it is between Hutu and Tutsi. But those who have suffered most from these recurring cycles of violence are the women and children.

The ordeal endured by women

The reason why I speak here of the ordeal of women and not of men is because in the context of generalized violence described above, both men and women may suffer atrocities leading to death or murder, but the women have more to suffer, especially given the many cases of rape.

In addition, in Africa, women are always excluded when the major decisions affecting society as a whole are taken. So women may be seen as innocent victims who know nothing about the motives and objectives behind all these wars. I stress the position of women because they are the ones who give life and who want to see that life develops and flourishes. They suffer the “pains of childbirth” all over again when life is threatened by oppression of any kind. The violence endured by the women in eastern DRC is many-faceted, the most obvious being killings, rape, looting and robbery.

Looting and robbery of family possessions

All these never-ending wars have stripped the people of all their social projects, destroyed many of the infrastructures and ruined the economy. The men are thus unemployed and cannot find work, nor can they go out to look for food. Congolese women, on the other hand, have shown great courage in the midst of this chaos. They have managed to ensure their families’ survival even at the risk of encountering the rebels and even if by going out they were exposing themselves to the danger of rape or death along the way. If they did not take this risk their family might be safe, but would still face death, not by the sword but by starvation. These women still keep working their fields, raising small animals and going to the forest to find firewood and charcoal.

It has to be said that the rebels and the militia carry off everything they find along their way. They pillage the fields, the animals, and have even torn up and destroyed germinating crops. Paradoxically, the daily reality for Congolese women is that, far from being liberated from oppression, they are being deprived of the very hope of life. The life of the whole society and of all its families is in danger. In this part of DRC, anyone who escapes the sword or the bullet is likely to fall victim to starvation.

There is nothing more heart-breaking for a woman than to see the life which she brought in to the world fading and dying. Her deepest wish is for her family to survive, even if it costs her own life. The situation of total chaos prevailing here has already made many women in the region ill and many are traumatised as a result of being systematically stripped of the little they possess and the projects that helped them to keep their families going.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Der Fischer Weltatmanach 2004 : Zahlen, Daten, Fakten*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Oktober 2003, pp. 501-501 and *Amnesty International Jahresbericht 2003*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, pp. 322-330.

Even though the end of the war has been officially declared, women in the east DRC still live with uncertainty, they are still exposed to death and rape, they still live in fear of what tomorrow will bring.

Women as victims of sexual violence

In times of political crisis, the men are quick to take up arms to show what they can do! The strongest kill and eliminate the weakest, or make them into slaves. Apart from firearms, sex is used to demonstrate the phallic power that can crush and annihilate women and young girls. In eastern DRC, grandmothers, mothers, daughters and even little girls as young as four have been violated. Rape seems to be systematically practised as though it were part of the law of war, whereas in fact it is an abusive act and one of those commonly known as a “war crime”. This situation accompanies almost every war in the world, but the ordeal imposed on the women of eastern DRC outdoes everything by the sheer intensity and depravity of it. It is beyond imagining. According to reports by humanitarian organizations working in the region, the war in DRC from 2nd August 1998 until 2003 produced 8000 cases of rape in the province of South Kivu alone. But, according to the same sources, the true figures are probably much higher because many women fear being ostracized and say nothing about the rape they have suffered.

In the province of North Kivu, for example, the medical service of “*Refuge pour femmes violées*”, a non-governmental organization, indicated that two years after the volcanic eruption that hit the town of Goma, they recorded more than 150 women being cared for in their hospital services after suffering sexual violence. However, this NGO stresses that there is a strong probability that “by the end of January 2004, the centre will be receiving twice that number, or more, because of easier access to places that were previously closed to humanitarian workers.” In his report, medical doctor Jacques Kalume, the director of the centre,⁵¹ explained that the American NGO “Doctors on call for service” (DOCS), which has been present in Goma since 1999, say that they have already treated more than 1,500 women, with the support of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Most of the victims come from the regions of Masisi and Walikale, some hundred kilometres north of Goma, Kalume said.

Here are some testimonies to illustrate what I have just said about the women who are rape victims. Pastor Nabino, who provides pastoral care for these victims has this to say: “The hospital at Panzi is one of the medical centres in the town of Bukavu trying to provide emergency care for these victims (...) There are thousands of women enduring deplorable living conditions. Some of them say they were raped by ten or more soldiers. None of them was raped by just one soldier. The most shocking thing is that, in some cases, when these madmen have finished raping them, they have gone on to thrust tree branches into their genital organs or to beat them with their rifles. The cruelty is beyond belief. Some women have been left paralysed, their genital organs destroyed. Most of them are infected with HIV/AIDS. They are aged from 10 to 80.”⁵²

In the region of South Kivu, in the Mwenga territory some 150km. south of Bukavu, Gertrude Mudekereza told me that rape had reached such proportions that they have started “purifying” women rather than repudiating them, using a rite normally used for women guilty of adultery.⁵³ She explained that in this territory, rape had been committed on such a scale that all the women and girls there had been raped. “At first the men repudiated their wives, then when they realized that they would have to repudiate all the women without exception, they started the purification rites,” she said.

⁵¹ Dr Jacques Kalume, gynecologist and obstetrician at the Centre pour refuge de femme violées, interviewed by telephone, Goma, 23.12.2003

⁵² Barhamanya Nabino, a pastor of CEPAC/Bukavu, interviewed about cases of rape being treated in the hospital, 23.12.2003.

⁵³ Gertrude Mudekereza works on behalf of women victims of sexual abuse. Interviewed in Bukavu, 10 December 2003.

These crimes are not only shameful for Congolese women, they also shame all those who have little power in the world and who could put a stop to this barbarity. The violence against women intensified with the second war of aggression against DRC. It seems as if the war encouraged the violence, which then became daily practice and finally, perversion. Despite all the efforts for peace this violence continues unperturbed. This is how one observer has described the depravity:

Since the beginning of this year, sexual violence is being ritually exercised so often that it is almost standard practice. Several men rape one woman, and do so several times. Her husband is bound hand and foot in their cabin and the children are brought in, too: all of them are forced to be present (...) The attackers force the family to engage in acts of incest between father and daughters or brothers and sisters. They even go so far as to sodomize some of the men, an act that is quite unthinkable in rural Africa, even in consenting relations.⁵⁴

Sexuality remains a taboo in Africa: sex can never be engaged in publicly, far less in front of one's own children. Customs are being overturned. These children are left inwardly shocked and injured. It teaches them to lose respect for everything to do with their culture or even to develop a deep-rooted hatred of all those guilty of raping their mothers.

It should be noted that a woman who has been raped ceases to exist socially. Even if she is still alive, the scars of the trauma she has suffered are not just physical, but also psychological. She is sick and deserves special care. Besides medical care for her body she needs what the psychotherapist Susan Sturdivant calls feminist therapy, which aims to bring relief to the women after the destructive acts they have endured. Women have been mistreated, humiliated, degraded, so now they have to be raised up.⁵⁵

The men who commit these atrocities have no idea of the physical and psychological costs of their loathsome actions. Incest is culturally prohibited in Africa and, if it occurs, it is punished according to traditional custom. The worst thing is that some of the men who commit these crimes have even gone on to execute some of their victims, on the pretext of saving them from shame and suffering.

Sometimes the women who have been raped are condemned to live in isolation. African humanism is under scrutiny as a result of this violence; it has been betrayed by these inhuman practices. The respect due to the one who gives birth to life has been trampled underfoot. The whole notion of decency has been lost, things that are taboo and prohibited are revealed for all to see. Violence holds the right of life or death over the women and young girls in whom the nation's hopes are vested.

Consequences of the violence on women

The women in DRC have taken over the men's role in order to keep their families alive, because the men have either been made unemployed or forcibly recruited by the rebel movement. Faced with this situation Congolese women have not been idle. According to Karin Wachter, who heads an International Rescue Committee programme, they have generally shown great strength. She says that the very fact the first thing they ask for are hoes, seeds and cooking pots proves their courage.⁵⁶

As a result of the sexual violations, the women have contracted sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. The prevalence of AIDS among the soldiers present in the region is estimated at 60%. Moreover, some common law criminals and bandits have also seized the opportunity of the general lawlessness to perpetrate violence against women and girls.⁵⁷

⁴ Le nouvel observateur in l'Hebdomadaire le coulisse, no. 2027, Sept.2003

⁵⁵ S. Sturdivant, *Les femmes et la psychothérapie, une philosophie féministe du traitement*, New York, Springer Publishing Company, 1980, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Cf. Human Rights Programme, *La guerre dans la guerre*, June 2002.

⁵⁷ Ibid.t

Some women and girls were held as sexual and domestic slaves. They now have unwanted pregnancies, with all the risks that may entail. Yet others will no longer be accepted in the family home once they have been raped and are repudiated by their husbands. Fearing this social exclusion some women preferred to keep quiet about what had happened to them and could therefore not seek the care they needed. They are likely to die of the torture they have endured or of the sexually transmitted diseases to which they have been exposed.

These women who have been dehumanized, annihilated and treated as objects live from day to day without really living. Their suffering is not only physical but also psychological and mental. Even if they do receive some medical treatment or social or material aid, they are still sick. In their suffering and their pain they are like the rest of society. Wounded in their self-esteem, they have not forgotten their torturers. If the occasion arises, they are ready to take their revenge – and this situation has a harmful effect on the children of the region.

The child victims of violence in eastern DRC

A society without children or young people is a society without a future. The eastern part of DRC has large numbers of children, boys and girls, a flourishing youth who carry the hopes of the nation. The violence perpetrated against them comes on the one hand from the war itself and on the other, from the consequences of the violence against the women, their mothers. In the former case, children under 17 years of age have been recruited into the militias and the armed forces, contrary to the Geneva Convention on the Rights of Children. What is special about the eastern DRC is that the children who are recruited are the youngest ones, who are still totally dependent on their parents; they are known locally as “*kadogo*”. They are forcibly snatched from their parents or from school and taken into the forest to receive military training. The ones who cannot keep up with the training die without their parents knowing anything about it. It has happened that, in the fighting, children from the same family, recruited by different groups, have found themselves face to face!

So, although the war has been officially ended by the Pretoria agreements, and some children who survived have been demobilized and returned to their families, they have become dangerous, not just amongst themselves but for their families and for society as a whole, because of the disastrous education they have been given. A close observer might say that in DRC, the aggressors’ principal intention in attacking the country’s children, who represent the future and the force of any country, was to wipe out and undermine the future of this country.

In the second case, the children are victims of the violence to which their mothers are subjected. According to Daligand, birth, the painful emergence from the primal nest, is so to speak the first experience of violence. All the more so because it means abandoning a world where we received everything without having to go out and get it (food, warmth, etc..). Barely emerged from the womb, the child’s eyes are assailed by light, its ears by noise, its skin by cold – all of which feels like aggression. At this stage the child is defenceless, having no words to express itself.⁵⁸

With regard to the violence committed against children in the eastern DRC, I would go even further back than Daligand, who based herself on the child’s experience of birth. Even in its mother’s womb a child can communicate and follow her movements and moods and feelings. But while they were carrying their child, these women were victims of every kind of violence; they were intimidated, terrorized, frightened by gunfire or explosions all the time – and the nightmare of rape and death was ever-present. So, even at this stage, these poor babies were already sharing the experience of violence with their mothers. Adult psychiatrists have frequently noted that the foetal stage of life is always active, and that vitalising or devitalising traces of it can be found in regard to difficulties experienced later in life. Child psycho-analysts have also observed psychotic children whose mental illness seems to be caused by a vital or sexual disability caused by some very serious

⁵⁸ L. Daligand, art.cit. p. 22.

emotional and symbolic disturbance during their life in the womb.⁵⁹ Psycho-analytic studies could be helpful in understanding that the violence in the eastern DRC is total and all-encompassing. It spares no-one, not even babies in their mothers' womb, and all the children born during this crisis are affected by it.

After birth, children need the warmth of their parents. They have a right to life and all the care they need. All the child's rights are duties and responsibilities for the parents. But in the situation I have just described, the family has been torn apart and the women have to struggle alone to maintain the household, at the price of their lives. The inability to satisfy their children's needs is yet another form of violence inflicted on women and it has serious consequences for the children's physical, psychological and mental development.

Consequences of the violence against children

Many children have been conceived, born and are growing up in a context of violence. They witness many scenes of violence inflicted on their parents, and suffer with them. This is a lost generation because they have been subjected to so much violence that, in the end, they have resort to the right to use violence to defend themselves and so in their turn become perpetrators of violence.

The widespread violence has led to parents abandoning their responsibilities, and the children who have suffered in this way are likely to become street children, thugs and delinquents. These children form gangs that live by violence and robbery. They are commonly known in the region as "*maibibo*". Their aggressive attitudes and behaviour show how the reign of violence has drained the vital strength of a society and diverted it into self-destruction.

With regard to the street children, Euchariste Paulhus identifies two categories. He says there are the street children who turn to delinquency because they are forced by circumstances to live on the streets; and there are the children who choose the streets because they already have the mentality of a delinquent. They are children whose mental structures have developed along anti-social lines from the earliest years of their lives. The former are the direct victims of unjust socio-political structures, while the latter are victims of the lack of love from those closest to them.⁶⁰

Both types of children are to be found in eastern DRC. The children are directly affected by the violence, which snatches them away from their families and decants them into the streets. Moreover, because of the violence, women are not able to show normal maternal affection for their children or the foetus they are carrying. Life in the womb until birth is affected by the violence, which causes nothing but trauma and suffering that prevent the mother from expressing love for her baby as a person. This lack of love may lead to the delinquency that leads in turn to drugs and prostitution.

The situation of the women and children in the eastern DRC cries out for the attention of everyone who wants to see a better future for humanity in general and for the region of the Great Lakes in particular. The children and their mothers are helpless and powerless, yet they are the key to society's future and survival. We believe that, given the situation in this region, if the women do not educate their children for peace, there is a great danger that they will grow up full of hatred for those who attacked them and perpetrated crimes against humanity, and peaceful coexistence will be compromised for several generations to come. Women are compelled to fulfil this mission to the best of their ability because, in African culture, it is the woman who guarantees the future, it is she who transmits education and culture from one generation to the next.

⁵⁹ Françoise Dalto, *Sexualité, féminité, libido, érotisme, frigidité*, 2nd edition, Paris, Scarabée et compagnie, 1982, p.50

⁶⁰ cf. E. Paulhus, *Enfants à risque*, Collection pédagogique psychosociale, éd. Fleurus, Paris, 1990, p.83.

With regard to the above, it must be said that political efforts to pacify the region are extremely important. Yet they will not be able to heal the hearts where violence broods, nor to remove the hatred of the perpetrators who have brought deliberate and endemic suffering to the Congolese people. This calls for an effort of education for a culture of peace in our own families and in our church communities.

Towards a culture of peace

Given the scale of the violence in the eastern DRC and the dangers that lie ahead for the future of society, education for peace is essential, not just in families, but for all who have to do with education in nursery schools, primary and secondary schools, universities, and in military, prison and hospital chaplaincies.

We believe that mobilizing the energy poured into serving violence and death and channelling it instead towards peace and life is not just a matter for the political authorities; in many ways it has much more to do with the role of the churches. The church has received from its Lord, Jesus Christ, a mission of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21) and peace-making, for Christ himself is the prince of peace. This reconciliation of the people will only be possible if each one of us is reconciled first with God, then with ourselves and finally with our neighbours. This being the case through its programme of ecumenical theological education the World Council of Churches encourages theological institutions to create curriculum that promotes peacemaking and reconciliation.

With regard to a culture of peace, we may rightly paraphrase the words of Cardinal G. Danniels, echoing the thinking of Pope John XXIII, when he said that a culture of peace does not depend so much on structures, even if these are essential, but much more on people. Alongside a just structure, he said, it is the countless gestures of peace between individuals and between states that create a kind of culture of peace.⁶¹ Education for a culture of peace addresses not only the aggressors, but also those who have been subjected to oppression by them. In the case of the Great Lakes, the women and children who have been victims of barbarity will either resort to violence in future as a mechanism of revenge for all the harm they have suffered, or they will develop a culture of peace, which will enable them to work through all the present traumas and violence. In particular, the churches and the theological training institutions must get involved in the search for lasting peace in order to halt the cycles of violence that are never far away in the region.

Various attempts to bring peace have already been made at the political level: agreements have been signed and discussions are underway, but in my view these approaches are likely to create an illusion of security rather than real peace. It seems doubtful that it will ever be possible to police every individual, which is why I believe it is important to educate the population for a culture of peace. As we have seen, violence is a problem that springs from the human heart. Peace will not be restored where everything has been laid waste by violence simply by rebuilding the social and political structures; above all we will have to eradicate the violence that resides in people's hearts.

This has less to do with politics and economics than with the mission of the church and of the family, as the nucleus of the nation, and all the other areas of education. To be effective this mission will have to take all aspects of the struggle to combat and prevent violence into account. It will have to accompany both aggressors and victims, condemning act of violence and trying to bring the two groups to make peace and act justly. This mission will also have to include therapy to help in healing all the women and children left traumatized by the violence and appropriate measures to care for the children who are born to keep them safe from further violence and thus break the vicious circle. For Paulhus, spiritual and moral values go together with more analytical approaches, education in

⁶¹ cf. G. Danniels, « Religion et paix » in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, no.125, 2003, pp. 529-539, p.532

the faith itself being part of the movement for healing.⁶² Without this dimension of education for peace, true reconciliation with the perpetrators of violence is practically impossible.

While recognizing all the work done so far by non-governmental organizations, the church itself has a not-inconsiderable contribution to make to this great mission for peace. It is well-placed to spread awareness of peace and ways of practising peace because it is still the place that assembles large numbers of people in Africa. What is needed in this struggle against violence is a fundamental shift of consciousness. Konrad Raiser, former general secretary of World Council of Churches writes:

“We must give up being spectators of violence or merely lamenting it and become active in overcoming violence within and outside the walls of the church. We remind ourselves and the churches of our common responsibility to speak out boldly against any defence of unjust and oppressive structures, the use of violence and gross violations of human rights committed in the name of any nation or ethnic group.”⁶³

Raiser's words underline the urgency and the relevance of the church's mission in this violent world. The question of peace and how to overcome violence is not a purely theoretical one, but a very practical one. So when it comes to education for peace, the institutions involved must themselves be places where peace and justice are seen to be practised.

I stress again the importance of the churches and the theological training institutions, because all the church leaders who have to speak to the people in the region receive theological formation. A major effort in awareness-building is needed on all sides because peace has to be built collectively, with everyone contributing their bit. It would be a great and significant undertaking if all theological institutions and the local churches active in the religious field were to form a network throughout the Great Lakes region in order to carry out their common mission of educating the people for peace, drawing on their relations at regional, continental and international level. We must invest in educating the women and children who are the future of the whole region.

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⁶² E. Paulhus, *Op.cit*, p. 251.

⁶³ Konrad Raiser, *For a culture of life. Transforming globalization and violence* Risk Book Series, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2002, p. 83

VIOLENCE, POVERTY, JUSTICE AND PEACEMAKING:

A BURMESE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Samuel Ngun Ling

Introduction

Apart from an accidental form of violence, any religious and cultural community would perceive the act of violence as a very complex phenomenon that entails different dimensions of ethical break-points against human will or conscience. Violence is by nature a forceful action of one's intentional will against the will of others. It causes the offensive psychological impacts (anxiety) and tragic physical damages or harms to other human beings. Literally speaking, violence and peace can neither be compromised nor be reconciled. Once one starts using violence, he or she may not stop using it and in the process violence thus becomes 'continuity'. Violence is also reciprocal in the sense that it becomes habitual to whoever practices it, imprisoning him or her in a circle that cannot be broken by other means. This might be the reason why Jesus warned his disciples saying, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt.26: 52). Moreover, all violence is identical with every other violence so that it is impossible to "distinguish between justified and unjustified violence, between violence that liberates and violence that enslaves."⁶⁴ Hence, violence begets violence and nothing else.

Violence and militarism: Myanmar context

In light of the above assumption, the power of any government that is seized by violent means in the form of military *coup de tat* has usually made violence the law of its government as in the case of any military-ruled nation in Asia. It is in such a militarized situation that violence becomes a culture of military regime, which exercises political power violently, with an intention of justifying the rulers and the violent activities they make in the name of national peace and reconciliation. Experiences of life's encounters in different socio-political contexts of Asia including Myanmar have explained the fact that violence and hatred interact and one is the result of the other. Both those who are opposed to and support the acts of violence often tend to overlook its root causes that lie behind it. Speaking from the context of a militarized country like Myanmar where ethnic violence and conflicts are rampant, addressing the root causes of violence may help reduce the acceleration of violence than addressing the issue itself directly. To be specific, the main causes of violence in any militarized nation have been due to do the result of mismanaged, scandalous, and corrupt social, economic, and political systems. Peacemaking in such a destitute situation may require a lot of works to bring about the structural change of those evil socio-political systems from their oppressive interactions to liberating tools.

Having observed carefully the life experiences of Myanmar people today, it has been and still is seen that what it means peace in Myanmar in terms of present socio-political situation is none other than subjugating people to a certain control of military order or force. This means that the military force or order of the government becomes almost the only means for controlling the various conflicts or for maintaining peace in this land. Violence is not intended to be overcome, but is rather put under a certain military control. Hence, in such a militarized situation, every act or movement of those who are opposed to the ruling systems of the central government has been simply interpreted as the act of counter violence, neglecting their rights and wills for freedom from their struggles against the central power or external control. When military power is mistakenly exercised such as to terrorize people against their wills in the name of peace, it worsens the situation and causes fears, intimidation, anxiety, ambiguity, psycho-breakdowns, and other various types of moral confusions.

⁶⁴Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (New York: The Sea bury Press, 1969), 93-103.

Hence, any approach to overcoming violence should take not only the external forms of socio-political structural change but also the religious spiritual qualities of internal peace in the lives of peacemakers or peace seekers. The Buddhist meditation practitioners claim that violence can be overcome from within (internal mind power) to without (external evil force).

Any non-violent approach to peace and reconciliation may therefore take a creative or holistic form, transforming unjust violence both internally and externally into creative and just forces. Religiously speaking, it is only through the internal peace forces of life that one can practice non-violence movement externally in the community. Nonviolence movement is actually more of the work of hearts than the work of mouths and hands. Rooted in human hearts, peace manifests itself as the most essential virtue of life. When *life* or *survival* is the basic end of peacemaking, even limited means of violent actions may be taken as an alternative to the nonviolent means to put violence to an end. Some human right activists categorize violence into two kinds: unjust and just violence. By 'unjust violence,' they mean violence that goes counter to the trends of human history or that enslaves humankind. By 'just violence,' they mean violence that liberates people and human history. In Myanmar history, the Burmese Nationalist Movement under Burma Independence hero, General Aung San (father of Aung San Suh Kyi) and other nationalists such as Saya San and U Wissara during the Anglo-Burma wars (1826-1855) and the colonial period (1855-1947) were movements that have demonstrated the 'just violence' in over a century-old history of British Burma.

Violence and nonviolence: the teachings of Buddha and Christ

Buddhist tradition

Buddhism is a religion of tolerance and life-reverence. Buddhist philosophy and tradition teaches and advocates strongly the non-violent ways of life. The Burmese Buddhist translation of the word 'violence' is, in Burmese Pali, "a-dhamma" and the literal meaning of "a-dhamma" is "violation of the law" or "distortion of the truth."⁶⁵ Despite the teachings of Buddha against violence, there were some indications about disputes, quarrels, divisions and violence that took place among the disciples of the Buddha in the time when Gautama the Buddha himself still lived among them. Among these incidents was a famous story of young Dirghayu, son of King of Kosala. In this story,⁶⁷ King of Kosala, in the hour of his death, said to his son, "O Dirghayu, my son! Do not look long, do not look short, for not by hatred is hatred appeased; hatred is appeased by not-hatred only." The story said that, these last words of King of Kosala had powerfully captured the spirit of his son and consequently prevented him from taking revenge upon his father's enemy, King Brahmandatt, who invaded his father's kingdom and slew his parents.

Fearful to be killed by Dirghayu, King Brahmadatt murmured saying, "My sleep is always restless because I often dream that young Dirghayu comes upon me with his sword and I awoke full of terror and alarm." But when young Dirghayu, with his right hand drawing his sword, appeared to him and said, "...The time of revenge has come," King Bradmandatt cried and beseeched, "Grant me my life, my dear Dirghayu, ...and I will grant you your life." Thus they took each other's hands and swore an oath not to do any harm to each other. When young Dirahayu was asked by King Brahmadatta, "What did his father mean by saying, "Do not look long, do not look short, for hatred is not appeased by hatred but by not-hatred alone, he replied, by "Not long," my father meant, "let hatred not last long," and by "Not short," he meant, "not to be hasty to fall out with friends."⁶⁸ Hence, in short, what he meant was that hatred is appeased not by hatred but by not-hatred alone.

This Buddhist story clearly shows how hatred and its violent motives could be overcome by not-hatred that is forgiveness, forbearance, and compassion (karuna). The flaming fire of hatred can be extinguished not by violent reaction or revenge but by not-violence, that is, forbearance in the

⁶⁵ This translation is based on *Seih-Saung English-Burmese Dictionary* and Pe Maung Tin, *Pali-English Dictionary* (Rangoon: British Burma Press, 1920).

⁶⁶E.A. Burtt, ed., *The Teachings of Compassionate Buddha: Early Discourses, The Dhammapada and Later Basic Writings* (New York: A Mentor Book, 1982), pp. 30-40.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid. 40-43.

teachings of compassionate Buddha. Hence, the Buddhists strongly hold a view that hatred begets only hatred and violence adds only fuel to violence.

Myanmar, predominantly a Theravada Buddhist country, believes in the non-violent philosophy of life and adopts the nonviolence culture as a unifying and edifying force to the enhancement of national life. Buddhism teaches neither speculative nor quiet philosophy of life but it rather teaches how to practice 'not killing life.' As a matter of fact, the Buddhists lived for centuries by this noble culture of 'not killing life,' so to speak religiously. 'Not killing life' deems much more profound than 'not killing people' since life belongs not merely to humans but to all creation. The Western understanding of life tends to be more human-centered (anthropocentric) than that of the East so their ethical responses to environmental issues (ecological violence) are rather weak or indifferent. In contrast to this view, life in Eastern religious philosophy, especially in the Buddhist philosophy, is interpreted as 'totality.'

Human life cannot be fully understood apart from thinking about its relation to other human and non-human lives. Hence, Buddhism strongly advocates and teaches the non-violent life culture as its universal message, and gives no moral support to any kind of violence or destruction of life. Buddha's dhamma message embraces universal love (metta), compassion (karuna) and tolerance; kindness, respect and reverence for all life, and stresses freedom from all selfishness, hatred and violence. Buddha proclaims, as in the story stated earlier, "Never by hatred is hatred appeased, but it is appeased by kindness. This is an eternal truth."⁶⁹ For the Buddha, the only conquest that can bring real peace and happiness to human kind is 'self-conquest.' "One may conquer millions in battle, but he who conquers himself, only one, is the greatest of conquerors,"⁷⁰ said the Buddha.

In light of the above teachings of the Buddha, there is nothing that can correspond directly to what the West calls, 'just war.' In actuality, Buddha did not merely teach about non-violence but he even went to prevent war as the story of King Ajatasattu who planned to attack the kingdom of the Vajjis has clearly indicated it.⁷¹ Moreover, the Jataka text also tells us that Buddha strongly felt in his days the need to have a just and good government that is in compliance with the "Ten Duties of the King" (dasa-raja-dhamma). The last three (eight, ninth and tenth) of these ten duties emphasizes, first of all, the non-violence (avihimsa) and promotion of peace by preventing war, violence, and all sorts of evil actions. Second, the duties describe patience, forbearance, tolerance and understanding (khanti) as spiritual virtues for the peacemakers who may confront with hardships, suffering and tortures. Third, the duties concern for non-opposition and non-obstruction (avirodha) that is to say that the ruler or the king should neither oppose to the will of the people nor obstruct that are conducive to the welfare of the people. Any ruler or king in the Buddhist tradition must rule over his people in harmony or in compliance with the prescribed ten duties. All these teachings of the Buddha and traditions of Buddhism have shown the fact that violence is neither a part of the Buddha's teaching nor a parcel of the Buddhist belief. It is only an evil phenomenon that occurs, first of all, on the individual moral scale and then expands its deceptive moral values from individual to national and international levels in different historical, geo-political, and socio-cultural contexts.

Christian tradition

Violence is identified and condemned as a sin and as the result of sin in many different forms and settings throughout the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. It begins with Adam and Eve since the Fall as the revolt against God, Creator, resulting in alienation from God and fellow human being. Sin of jealousy had led Cain to take the innocent life of his own brother, Abel (Gen. 4). This story of Cain tells us that jealousy (sin) is the cause of violence, resulting in hatred, killing, kidnapping, rape, and warfare. Violence in the Bible is, in many instances, a result of psychological breakdowns, social alienation or displacement and of the various types of moral prejudices since the Fall. Many non-Christians often argue that the Christian Bible especially the Old Testament contains

⁶⁹Cf. Dhammapadatthakatha VIII 4, in Walpola Sri Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Revised edition), with a foreword by Paul Demieville (London: the Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd., 1996), p. 86.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹ Walpola Sri Rahula, p.84.

numerous evidences of violence such as tribal conflicts, family conflicts (in case of polygamy), women raping, and political competitions for kingship and many other forms of oppression of one group over another. But these historical circumstances of the Israelite people were not necessarily representative of God's original or final purposes for humankind. They rather appeared to be confined to a certain scale of God's providential intention.

One can relate what God's original intention implies in the New Testament against the law of violence to how violence was practiced for particular purposes in the Old Testament time as indicated earlier. Based on what Jesus said in his Sermons on the Mount, "I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it" (Matt. 5: 17), it becomes clear that the hidden meaning of the Old Testament prophecies have now come to its full realization in Jesus Christ in the New Testament and onwards. Thus Jesus' approach to violence in the New Testament is very peculiar, as He articulated His own way of active nonviolence in the following steps:⁷² seize the moral initiative; find a creative alternative to violence; assert your own humanity and dignity as a person; break the cycle of humiliation, refuse to submit or to accept the inferior position; expose the injustice of the system and avoid flight and fight or surrender and revenge.

Christians ought to ponder profoundly what "Jesus' way" or "Jesus' Third way" in Walter Wink's terms,⁷³ that is, non-resistant and yet active means in practical life. In Matthew 5:39, Jesus clearly taught about "turning the other cheek," which he meant, "turning violence down to peace." "Turn the other cheek" may imply, in view of Jesus, a total refusal to any act of violence, even if such a non-violent reaction results in suffering and death. But one should not apply this way of Jesus as an excuse for refusal to violence in any situation. Because nodding head to whatever violent act without any critical knowledge about it and without any proper reaction to it would be neither the way of Christ nor Christian. For Jesus abhors both passivity and violence as responses to evil. Jesus' non-violent approach to violence is always in the form of revolution, transforming and creating a new situation. In other words, it calls for "discovering creative alternatives that transcend... submission or violence, flight or fight."⁷⁴

Hence through his teachings, we see that Jesus tried to overcome violence by forgiving love and tolerant patience, replacing it with creative, non-violent alternatives such as humanitarian cooperation, reconciliation, and participation or involvement. By replacing violence with peace, Jesus reversed the root of violence and its trends by means of love or tolerance in different directions, transforming them into creative tools for building a peaceful community after God's kingdom. In fact, Christians who are followers of Jesus Christ ought to imitate him in combat against the roots of violence for the making of peace. This combat against violence may be what Paul means when he says, "... If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink, for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil (violence), but overcome evil with good (peace)" (Romans.12: 20-21). This text implicitly unfolds the fact that the power of love is much stronger than the potential of violence. Knowing this reality, Paul added moral warnings to the believers saying, "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Eph. 4:26-27). Paul's idea here is in compliance with Jesus' teaching, which says, "But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Matt.5: 22).

Many forms of domestic violence such as dispossession of parental heritages and broken family relationships have often occurred when anger or hatred breaks out. When such anger or hatred is put under human control, then, violence may not normally take place. Together with anger or hatred, other human evil desires (Tahna in Buddhist terms) such as greed, envy, jealousy, and popularity also tend to cause violence in the community as Paul indicates explicitly, "...those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (ITim.6: 9). Hurtful desire, based on whatever religious

⁷² Walter Wink, "Jesus' Third Way," in *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking*, eds. Robert & Judy Zimmerman Herr, Foreword by Konrad Raiser (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), pp. 35-40.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 41.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

claims is, in fact, a kind of evil internal force that helps shape moral violence substantially and that stands as the primal cause for all kinds of human violence.

Jesus Christ had conquered the world of violence on the cross by means of agape love (i.e., self-sacrificing love for others) and this love has strong power to end various types of violence in human society. His powerful agape love has drawn all people to himself (John 12:32), that is to the cross – to the end of all human sins or violence. Christians should therefore follow their crucified Lord in bearing their own crosses to break the cycle of human violence and to search for creative and redemptive ways of mitigating conditions, which provoke anger, pride, envy and violence. Not only that, they must be also ready to help the potentially violent people to discover non-violent ways of expression. If Christians make whole-hearted efforts to find the non-violent, peaceful response to any violent movement in such a way, then it would be certainly understood that these efforts of peacemaking are not of human will but of the will of Christ.

Evaluation on just war theory and nonviolence movement

Just war theory

Just war theory, developed by Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, John Locke and others, attempts to limit both resort to war and the conduct of war to what justice allows. The rules for just war⁷⁵ include:

- the only just cause is defense against violent aggression;
- the only just intention is to restore a just peace to friend and foe alike;
- the use of military force must be the last resort, after negotiations and every other resort have been tried and have failed;
- the decision must be made by the highest governmental authority;
- when conducting war, a war must be for limited ends only, sufficient to repel aggression and re-address its injustice;
- the means must be limited by proportionality to the offence;
- a non-combatant immunity from intentional and direct attack must be respected,
- combat should not be prolonged when there is no reasonable hope of success within these limits.

Just war theory believes that evil can be restraint by the coercive power of the state. Those who take this aspect and advocate violence as a means for the conquest of evil may include Christian militants from Constantine to the Crusades inspired by Israel's wars of conquest in the Promised Land, and the Christian nations like Americans today who took a preemptive attack against Iraq in the name of "peace for terrorist arms." There were historical indications about the Christians' aggressive willingness to employ violence in the name of Christ in the past that led to what is known today as 'just war' theory.

The idea is that Christians deliberately use violent means such as armed forces in order to stop social evils, to maintain law and order, and to protect national boundaries and populations. But these intentional violent movements must be limited in scope and duration, precisely targeted at the enemy; shall not harm the innocent, and finally they must be undertaken for a principled and just cause. Violent actions against the assailant or attacker in favor of personal self-defense and in protection of personal dignity may be considered just and possible. In other instances, violence may be justified even in a revolt against the violent government if the latter is clearly not fulfilling the norms of Romans. 13 as a promoter of justice, good and crusher of evil. In whatever cases, the just

⁷⁵*New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, edited by David J. Atkinson & et al., (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: Intervarsity Press, 1995), p. 521.

war theorists hold that violence or war must be the last resort. That means that all realistic non-violent alternatives must be tried before one resorts to war.

The point here is the fact that just war theory should not be manipulated for self-justification over against the advantage of the other. Theory of the American pre-emptive attack is a sort of self-manipulation of the war at the expense of others. The church and followers of Christ should not support such a pre-emptive use of state military power to stop violence and to end the cycle of terrorist network, which was ironically named by the Bush government as “axis of evil.” There is no war that is just per se. What makes war a just war is never the manipulated power of the war itself but the profound humanitarian concern that stands before, during, and after the war for justice, peace, and human dignity.

Nonviolence movement

Nonviolence is a philosophy that respects the personhood even of the enemy and therefore seeks to end social evils such as oppression, injustice and invasion and also to reconcile the oppressor. The concept of nonviolence requires the distinction between coercion and violence. Power or coercion is not innately evil. If used both for good ends and in non-lethal ways that respect the integrity of persons, coercion can be good. Coercion is violent and immoral when it becomes lethal or fails to respect the integrity of persons. Historically speaking, nonviolence philosophy is not new that various nonviolent methods of overcoming violence had been developed and practiced throughout the past centuries.⁷⁶

Coming to modern period, the nonviolent movements owe a great inception to religious-based pacifists' movements. Both Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) who led India's Hindu nonviolent struggle for independence from Britain (1919-1946) and Martin Luther King Jr. whose Christian nonviolent civil rights movement changed the history of America today, have deservedly become the household names of modern nonviolent success. Religious pacifists like these heroic peacemakers hold a view that violence is always wrong so that the methods for resisting oppression, injustice, and war must always be nonviolent. These pacifists have demonstrated by their nonviolent movements that nonviolence often worked in this world of conflicts and war. The problem of pacifism is that its practitioners have often disassociated themselves either from society or from political life, and especially from war. Such pacifist idea of peace being disassociated from the world has raised questions especially in regard to the full implication or realization of the peace of Christ or God's kingdom on earth.

The church history tells us that Christian groups who take similar aspect of overcoming violence by nonviolence or who advocate the nonviolent or non-resistant approach (quietist approach) include the Mennonites, Quakers, the Pacifists, and all other humanitarian and human rights movements under the Christian banner. These Christian pacifists strive to find alternative ways actively to make peace and stop violence as they reject all recourse to violence against human beings. They constantly seek to develop effective socio-political movements, at least to a certain degree, to challenge oppression in a way that is consistent with their pacifist philosophy. The astonishing successes, which these Christian pacifists have contributed to the nonviolence movements in the past decades, have been remarkably increased.

Among nonviolence movements that had been and still are organized by both the Christian and non-Christian pacifists for overcoming violence include peaceful public demonstrations, work stoppages, showing posters, distributing political pamphlets, fasting or hunger strike, and peaceful negotiation with the authority that is depending on public accessibility and freedom of movement that may be given in the region. In any violent circumstance, the most compelling general stance from both biblical and practical standpoints would be that of **active peacemaking**, that is, an active and constant commitment to nonviolent ways of resisting violence and evil. After all, the danger of

⁷⁶ Dr. Gene Sharp distinguishes 198 different nonviolent tactics in his book, *Exploring Nonviolent Alternatives* (Boston: MA, USA, 1970).

violence is not necessarily the damage it causes to the innocent people in a certain time and place but the escalating power of it that violence invites another violence like an evil spirit in the Bible, who returns to his old house with other seven spirits more evil than himself (Luke 11:24-26). In this light, no violence can stop violence and no war that can ever end another war. War is never a good answer for war. Terrorism can never be fully eliminated, as George Bush's government of America believes, by pre-emptive military attack.

Military power always invites violent counter-strikes and conflicting reactions, as war on Iraq has witnessed it, when it is used as an excuse for overcoming violence or terrorism. Pre-emptive military strike is merely another form of terrorism or violence, taking the advantage of one group over the other. Such a pre-emptive attack cannot justify the attacker's violent acts upon the attacked – the innocent war victims. Jimmy Carter, the former president of the United States of America and Nobel Peace Prize winner, seems to have drawn public applauses at global level when he called the American invasion of Iraq a serious mistake of the Bush government saying, "I thought it was a serious mistake, may be the worst mistake in foreign policy that our country's made in many years..."⁷⁷ Apparently, the world community wants to hear such a bold statement that calls for the restoration of justice, peace and human dignity in the mess of the world order.

Children, women, and violence

Children and violence

To children, violence is really an epidemic. It could have even grown as a moral behavior, immunizing them to be victims of evil social forces. Violence by children may occur in any family by various means, regardless of the religious background of their parents. It is actual insanity that children shooting children with guns have become a common issue in the West especially in the United States of America (USA). People in the West, especially political leaders often talk about public health care, violence prevention, and guns control. Generally speaking, when the poster signs with blunt slogans like "Stop Killing People" are almost like a common reading in the secular West, such slogans are not so familiar with the public minds in the religious East. The United Nations General Assembly have, on 20 November 1989, approved and adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and thereafter various programs and activities for children have been made in honor of that day in many nations around the world including Myanmar, with the cooperation of local UN Agencies and NGOs which work for the Rights of the Child, Prevention of Child Abuse and Child Healthcare. In Myanmar, the theme of 2003 for Child Protection Day (November 22, 2003) was, "Lets Protect Children to make the world beautiful."⁷⁸ The aim and purpose of Children Protection Day, 2003, in Myanmar was to promote child participation and raise public awareness on child protection, especially child abuse, child neglect and child trafficking or exploitation.

Children violence in Myanmar is mainly behavioral. This is in a way because of economic (poverty) problems and in other way, because of poverty-related moral corruption that affects the whole nation from the poorest to the richest or most powerful. In Myanmar, cases such as child molestation, child sexual abuse, and child pornography, which are common in the West, is not known, although the issue of child labor receives nationwide attention. Many children of poor families from rural areas today engage themselves to work in hard labor in order to earn less than a dollar per day for their daily survival. Each year child laborers rapidly increase in number especially in urban cities like Yangon and Mandalay. Many times, these children workers were treated violently by their employers, and forced to work in places such as restaurants, roadside tea/coffee shops, and car workshops even beyond the extent of work and time that these children with their limited ages could bear. In cities, one child labor is usually paid estimated from 200 to 500 kyats (the equivalent

⁷⁷ *The New Light of Myanmar News Paper* (Wednesday, 26 November, 2003), p. 5. When he was in Columbia (US) on 25 November, 2003 to sign copies of his new revolutionary war novel, namely, "The Hornet's Nest," former president Jimmy Carter called the American invasion of Iraq one of the country's worst foreign policy blunders, and predicted it may take a dozen years to bring stability and democracy to the region.

⁷⁸ *Shwe Myanmar Journal* (December 1-15, 2003) in English, published by U Khin Maung Latt, Director General, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Yangon, Myanmar, p. 3.

of 20 to 50 cents in US dollars) per day, although he or she may work fulltime or even overtime from 7:00am early morning to 8:00 pm late evening almost every day. Some rural children who have migrated to the cities chose not to work but to beg a piece of pence from pedestrians, motorists and car drivers on the streets, in the market places, in front of restaurants or hotels, in the stores, and in many other places. Although these children survive by living from hand to mouth on daily basis, moving from one location to another, most of the time they are homesick, insecure or helpless, dispossessed or neglected and despised or disregarded. Their life experiences lead them to various kinds of physical deficiency, psychological depressions and moral breakdown so that they grow as victims of hopelessness and meaninglessness for their future.

Recently, in Myanmar, the child labor issue received serious attention from the military government when a group of parents sold their children to the brokers to work in Thailand. The incident was such that six Myanmar girls aged 6 to 12 were trafficked into Thailand for child labor.⁷⁹ According to a Myanmar Newspaper, these six children were from the regions of Myawady and Bilin townships from lower Myanmar and they were lured from their parents by traffickers in person and sold into Thailand the previous year (2002). It was also learned that these children were forced to sell candies and flowers at Karaoke clubs and bars in Bangkok, Thailand. They were, however, brought back to Myanmar safely on January 2, 2004, after two years of labor in Thailand, with the cooperative assistance from the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok, and from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, the Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children of the Development and Welfare of Thailand, which provided custody to the victims and transferred them to the Myanmar government.⁸⁰ Similar cases of child labor issue seem to be widespread all over the country, though no governmental attention is given till date.

Women and violence

Women in Myanmar today have emerged as a new revolutionary group who struggle for their selfhood, right and human dignity against the male-dominated Myanmar culture. It is through this patriarchal culture that Myanmar women were for many centuries acculturated to subjugate their roles as inferior to men. These submissive roles of Myanmar women have to do much with the imposition of their religion and culture. Myanmar Buddhist girls are not normally allowed, for instance, to go through a ceremony of what is called in Burmese, *shinpyu* - a ceremony of initiation into Buddhist novice-hood. Burmese Buddhist women are not qualified candidates for entering Nirvana, and to be a woman is considered a result of bad karma in the past life. Christian women are no exception that their ministerial women ordination is still rejected by many church leaders. Religion and culture have therefore strongly dominated both the Buddhist and Christian Burmese women's lives that even educated women will support a view that they are less worthy than men and that they do not need liberation from male dominance.⁸¹

With regard to violence on women, militarism or military presence is experienced as a serious threat to sexual violence of women in Asian regions (Philippines, Korea, Japan) including Myanmar. In many parts of Myanmar, especially in regions where minority ethnic people reside, there are reports of incidents of women rapes and other various forms of sexual violence committed by military men and their counterparts. Many Myanmar women dare not report such incidents of sexual assault or violence. One reason is because of fear of being tortured by those rapists, and the other is because of the pressures of Myanmar (Buddhist and primal religious) culture of shame or secret on sexual matters. There have been verbal reports, unrevealed rumors or secret talks on a number of cases of sexual harassments against women that are believed to have happened between military men or officers and women office workers or young attractive girls in several ethnic regions. Some young girls in certain ethnic regions have been said, for instance, systematically persuaded into sexual harassment of military men through secret sexual brokers who were well paid.

⁷⁹*The New Light of Myanmar* (Saturday, 3 January, 2004), p. 16

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹Anna May Say Pa, "Birthing an Asian Feminist Theology in the Face of the Dragon: A Burmese Perspective," in *RAYS MIT Journal of Theology*, vol. 3 (February, 2002), p. 21

Due to the increased militarization and anti-insurgency measures in some ethnic regions such as Wa and Shan states, women are increasingly vulnerable to rape or forced to get married with military men.⁸² In such a situation, women rapes often took place when girls or women were caught outside the village or a porter camp; when women were forced to porter, and when they were forced to stop at military checkpoints. In such a case, since women's bodies were often viewed (by the male armies in this context) as sexual bodies for objects of self-enjoyment, "physical violence against women has become an important gender-related dimension."⁸³ This kind of physical (sexual bodies) violence against women has often occurred increasingly in wherever country of Asia including Myanmar where military personnel are encamped. Sexual violence against women becomes almost like a universal culture of militarism. In fact, rehabilitation of the lives of prostitutes, promotion of the social status of tortured, raped, despised women, securing the security of assaulted and oppressed women, protecting the rights of outcast, dispossessed and discriminated women and spiritual care or counseling for HIV/AIDS infected women have become the most challenging theological issue and a highly demanded mission task of the church in Myanmar today.

Violence, poverty and justice

According to Aristotle,⁸⁴ justice is categorized into three types: distributive justice, corrective justice and justice in exchange. Distributive justice is concerned with equality between equals. Corrective justice is equality between crime and punishment, while justice in exchange refers to equality between whatever goods are changed. I would like to make here an attempt to relate what justice means in terms of Aristotle's equality to what justice is in terms of economic poverty, which is a result of the unjust exploitations by the rich. My intention here is to seek justice against the misery of poverty and to theologically address that issue and its related violent networks in the framework of justice. Is the cause of poverty and violence the absence of justice? Do people encounter poverty and violence on account of and for the sake of justice? How do poverty and violence interact either against or for justice? The answers to these questions would have to be varied based on the social and geo-political climates and conditions where such issues took place.

People's views, definitions and perspectives on 'poverty and justice' differ from one location to another, depending on the different socio-political, religious and cultural experiences they had come through. In Latin American Christian (Catholic) context, poverty has social and spiritual implications.⁸⁵ The former views poverty as a "scandalous condition" that designates the weak, the destitute and the oppressed that is destructively contrary to human dignity and the will of God. The later recognizes poverty as "spiritual childhood" that indicates a spiritual virtue that is the "ability to accept God, openness to God, willingness to be used by God, and humility before God."⁸⁶ In the Buddhist context of Myanmar, poverty is interpreted in different perspectives. From religio-cultural perspective, material poverty is viewed as an inborn fate predetermined by and as a result of one's bad kamma in the past and voluntary poverty or religiously-dedicated poverty (i.e., monastic life) as a spiritual virtue for accumulating multiple merits for their next nibbanic life. From economic and political perspectives, many look at poverty in Myanmar as a result of the country's disintegrated economic systems and mismanaged political governance.

In the Christian biblical view, poverty is neither caused by God's curse nor by human fate or kamma in Buddhist terms as a result of past deeds, but it is caused conditionally by the injustice of the oppressors and the oppressed whom the prophets had often condemned in the biblical time (Amos 5: 1-27). For biblical prophets like Amos, Micah, Hosea, Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Isaiah, poverty

⁸²See *License to Rape*, a research book on women issue by the Shan Human Rights Foundation and the Shan Women's Action Network (published in May, 2002).

⁸³ Reinhold Traiter-Espiritu, "Violence Against Women's Bodies," in *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*, edited by May John Mananzan and et al., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 69

⁸⁴ Aristotle, "The Varieties of Justice," in *Justice: Alternative Political Perspectives*, ed., James Sterba (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 14-15.

⁸⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Mary knoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1973), pp. 291-302.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 296.

was never the creation of the poor. It was always the evil products of the rich and powerful. When biblical prophets like Amos addressed poverty and injustice issues, he did it so publicly in a strong protest against the oppression and exploitation of the rich and powerful of that time. Such a prophetic stance has become the biblical model or paradigm for all types of Christian liberation movements being carried out in different contexts of African, Latin American and Asian countries in the past decades. The theological mode of Jose Miguez Bonino shows such a biblical prophetic stance when he wrote, "Poverty is not a hazard of fortune or a fact of nature but the result of certain people's greed and injustice. It is intolerable because it contradicts the very purpose of God's mighty act of deliveranceit robs man[human] of his [their] humanity...breaks human solidarity, and consequently it destroys fellowship among men [and women] and with God..."⁸⁷

In a multi-cultural and an economically underdeveloped country like Myanmar, almost all types of violence occur, so to speak, because of systematic exploitation of the rich and the powerful over the poor mass population and among themselves. At political level, as some cases have already been discussed earlier, violence occurs when the powerless families are exploited by the powerful elite groups in various forms of exploitations such as porters, forced labors, rapes, (women and children) human trafficking (pwa-sa in Burmese), child labors, child abuses, drug addictions, and infections of diseases such as malaria, cancer and global HIV & AIDS epidemic.

Today at the economic and educational levels, many young people in Myanmar have lost their jobs, received extremely poor university education and have no life security for their future. Since these young people have much leisure times, they engage themselves in doing immoral things such as drinking alcohol, drug addiction, gambling (Chay in Burmese), sex abuses, and robbery works. Crimes such as robbery (kha-paih-hnaik or da-miah-taih in Burmese), bribery (laphek-yi-hpo in Burmese), cheating (lein-lay hmuh in Burmese), and stealing (Kho-hmuh in Burmese) prevail over the country and these increase yearly especially among the youth. Due to the collapse of the country's economy since 1988, the unjustly operated business and economic exploitations of the rich and powerful people upon the poor mass have been intensified as the open market system begins to be practiced.

Unfortunately, the majority of the poor people are hence mistaken in making attempts to alleviate their poverty by means of engaging themselves in the mess of those exploitative or even immoral actions, instead of finding the just, peaceful and better ways for tackling those complicated problems. Hence, poverty in this country is seen as the major cause and effect of various kinds of economic and political exploitations, social conflicts, moral injustice, and human violence. The situation, however, calls for revolutionary actions of the people as to eradicating poverty, enhancing life's survival, and resisting unjust exploitations. The question of life and death, that is, 'survival issue' must be the central agenda when seeking justice and liberty in such a revolutionary context. Five elements of Jurgen Moltmann's circles of death⁸⁸ have reflected this revolutionary reality in seeking justice between poverty and violence.

Conclusion

Violence and poverty are internally connected as to one is the cause or effect of the other. In order to overcome violence and to end all evil forces of poverty and injustice in Myanmar, it may require a radical change in the overall economic and political systems of the country. Justice must be the central concern for tackling such poverty and violence issues, and peacemaking in this context must be holistic in approach as to reconstructing and restructuring the whole systems of life. Peace building in this country must be a kind of long educational process, which calls for a radical change of human attitude, mentality, spirituality and lifestyle - creation of a new praxis from passive co-existence to active pro-existence according to the model and way of Christ.

⁸⁷ Jose Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in A Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 112.

⁸⁸Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 330-331.

**PEACEMAKING AND ECUMENICAL COOPERATION
IN ST. PETERSBURG**

Vadim Alexeev

Called to be peacemakers

The topic of violence and peace is organically and constantly present in classical theological education in Russia. Orthodox theological schools and other confessional schools now include it in the subject entitled Moral Theology where the use of force while struggling against the evil, and pacifism are discussed. Various approaches, depending on the confession, are used in these discussions. However, the discourse of peace as an aspect of evangelization is part of the common ecumenical service. This is why the traditional homily of peace is accepted in all Christian confessional traditions.

‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those who have His good will’ (Lk 2, 14) – these words of the angels were a proclamation of the birth of our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who delivers people from sin and reconciles them with God, by the power of his sacrifice. Christ is ‘our peace’ (Eph. 2, 14) and it is the vocation of Christians to strive for peace. Service for the sake of the victory of peace on earth is not only a commandment and task; it is the outward requirement of the sincere Christian believer. In the service of Christ as ‘Prince of Peace’ (‘You are indeed the Prince of Peace’ - declares the Orthodox Church in its worship), the Christian finds happiness. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers...’ (Math. 5: 9). This is not only the individual understanding of a person who has held Christian morals for a long time, their vocation; such is the understanding, common to all churches, of the Church’s mission. As the body of Christ, the Church must not be rent by conflicts. The Church was set up as the tree of life, as the ship of salvation, God’s Church on earth, bringing peace to the world.

Christian peacemaking efforts, creative activity in the establishment of peace, are proliferating in the measure of Christians’ understanding of their responsibility, of the responsibility of humanity, in preserving the sacred gift of life entrusted to it. For a long time in Russia (also in whole former USSR), peacemaking has been proclaimed one of the important aspects of the work of the Christian Church and its organizations, but for the time being it is still far from being recognized by all Christians as one of the aspects of the Church’s mission.

After that great tragedy of the twentieth century – the Second World War – it became evident that peacemaking is not only the reconciliation of hostile countries, it is above all a striving to prevent conflict. Therefore, peacemaking demands active involvement in problems of social inequality, political instability, economic transformations of a revolutionary type, breaches of human rights, control of inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-denominational conflicts, etc. The victory over Fascism in 1945 did not guarantee the disappearance of such ideologies from the minds of our citizens. Now, as previously, we are seeing the manifestation of inter-ethnic discord, including anti-Semitism. Local wars, claiming millions of lives, have not ceased.

Consequently, Russians felt the risk of another bitter war at the close of the last century, when hostilities took place in Afghanistan, Chechnya and former territories of the USSR. Besides people’s sacrifices, war inflicts colossal injury on society, throwing its economic and political evolution back by many years. At the same time, it should be realized that conflict appears as an inalienable part of evolution – change in the distribution of resources or the power of plenipotentiaries inevitably leads to a conflict of interests. In the face of this, peacemaking efforts can exert a significant influence on the course of the development of a conflict and all of its stages and effectively diminish the waste

affecting the sides participating in a conflict. In order not to permit the growth of civil or political conflicts into war, joint efforts by the civil and social structure are essential. The international experience has shown that participation in the peacemaking process by different social strata and groups with non-governmental mediation and church organizations promote the effectiveness of the resolution of conflict situations. A striking example of this is provided by the peaceful transition from an apartheid regime to democracy in the Republic of South Africa. Thanks to broad social dialogue and mediation in sensitive terms by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) violence and civil war were successfully avoided. In this and other cases, experts particularly stress the positive role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which, in comparison with the state structures, are achieving greater flexibility, representing the interests of different strata of society and, as a result, obtaining additional opportunities for the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

Peacemaking activity would be inconceivable without cooperation on these different levels and in these directions. This action is not isolated, and, in mutual cooperation with local powers and with international organizations, local NGOs become a basis for stability in the many countries of the world. In Russia public peacemaking movements are presently taking their first steps. A peculiarity of the peacemaking ideas and movements in Russia since the time of the Soviet regime was their indissoluble primary orientation towards the struggle for rights and freedom, against the sway of a totalitarian state. In the Soviet Union two trends of peacemaking activities existed simultaneously – one was official, inspired and supported by the state, the other, which had absolutely no link with it, was a movement from below, directed against the ideology of militarism and the violence of the state itself. Both movements made a substantial contribution to the work of peacemaking, both of which were fruitful. Despite the fact that the organizer of the official peacemaking models was the Soviet State, from their course emerged concrete initiatives, decision-making that objectively furthered peace and stability.

The Church actively participated in these, not only in the USSR, but also in foreign countries. In the Soviet Union this was also a truly ecumenical activity, although one should keep in mind that there were very few non-Orthodox communities at that time. Another trend, an unofficial rights-protecting movement, undermined the violently founded totalitarian regime and approached the termination of the cold war. In the new Russia, what was linked with the Soviet regime came to be conceived of negatively: in this case, the achievement of the past years. However, the necessity of separating the grain from the weeds must not be forgotten.

At the current moment in Russia, information about public peacemaking efforts is at a minimum: one might almost say it does not exist. It is essential to revive and, in many instances, create anew, Russian peacemaking, such that it is not only a movement, or concrete initiatives, but a peacemaking culture itself; to achieve it essentially using native and foreign experiences. Christians can and must be initiators and leaders of this process.

In today's Russia, we are returning to the orthodox ideal of holiness. The holiness of the "passion bearers", the princes Boris and Gleb, who did not wish to take up arms against their brother, even though danger threatened their lives, later became the holiness which glorified our Local Council, the Russian Orthodox Church. Christians of other denominations in Russia also drew support from the rich tradition of service to Christ, who is "our peace" (Eph. 2:14). The preservation of peace, the prevention and overcoming of conflicts – this is the sphere which demands cooperation, the combined efforts of the individual Christian and the Church. Christian peacemaking must in its very concept, by its very name, be ecumenical.

Interchurch Partnership and peacemaking

In the framework of the Interchurch Partnership "Apostolic City – Nevskaja Perspektiva" the peacemaking centre "Irenicon" (from the Greek word "peace") was created, in Saint Petersburg in 1999. The Interchurch Partnership is an educational and missionary organization, in which Orthodox (in this case the Armenian Church is also represented), Catholics, Lutherans and representatives of other Christian traditions realize joint projects of a scientific, educational and culturally enlightening nature and conduct social work. The Association of Christian Theological Institutions

of St. Petersburg was created on the basis of the Interchurch Partnership. Its principal objective is developing and promoting cooperation as concerns of the most topical areas of theological education. Peacemaking is one of these areas.

Different sorts of objective are facing the peacemaking centre, for the realization of which work, some theoretical and some practical, is essential. Above all, the centre must further the development and improvement of inter-confessional relationships, resolving existing and preventing possible inter-confessional tensions and conflicts. Unfortunately, in today's anti-ecumenical atmosphere, the difficulty of accomplishing this task is great. If Christians do not themselves embody such ideals in their lives, do not live in the world without interdenominational conflicts and tensions, if they will not bring the world, and even more so their brothers and sisters in Christ, the light of peace and love, it is difficult to expect the success of peacemaking among people who profess other ideals, following not the law of love but the principles of an ideology.

For the outlining and overcoming of interdenominational conflicts the "Irenicon" centre, in cooperation with the Ecumenical Resource Centre, goes about research and practical programs. It analyses reciprocal relationships in the Church, separate movements and faith groups within each church, basing these on historical material, on material from the mass media (in this case, publications on Internet sites). At the Centre, meetings of believers and seminars with participation by Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran representatives are held: in the latter case, seminary students conduct discussions. "Irenicon's" objective in disseminating information about the believers of other confessions is to help to destroy false stereotypes, "images from the devil", and to further the improvement of interchurch relationships.

The peacemaking centre "Irenicon" supports initiatives in the establishment and development of inter-religious dialogue – such dialogue reduces the risk of conflicts on religious grounds. The gathering and analysis of information is carried out side by side with this aim, the centre's staff conducting meetings with representatives of different religious groups (Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, etc.). Personal acquaintances, trusting relationships of the centre's staff with members of differing religious communities allows them to step forth in the capacity of mediators in conflict situations.

Inter-ethnic relationships, which are usually narrowly linked with inter-religious ones, also lie within the centre's sphere of study. The centre carries out the analysis of the problems of national minorities that in the long term will permit the production of recommendations in relational tactics and strategies for the overcoming of interethnic conflicts. This will come about by meetings with representatives of ethnic communities. It is intended that with time Irenicon will become a resource centre, accumulating information about inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationships in the city and the region. Information will be accessible to any organization, interested in the prevention of corresponding conflicts.

The centre's strategic objectives are the consolidation of a culture of peace and non-violence, a culture of dialogue and respect towards other opinions, other outlooks, other faiths, national or cultural affiliations, also education in tolerance, the support of democracy and the bringing into being of a civil society in Russia.

In order to achieve its objectives Irenicon sets up links of cooperation with national and international like-minded organizations. In 2000, as a department of the Interchurch Partnership, it became an affiliated member of the Pax Christi International peace movement. Some important international peacemaking activities of the centre were done with the support and in cooperation with the Social Service of the German Evangelical Church (Diakonisches Werk der EKD), the Global Ministries of the Uniting Protestant Churches in the Netherlands, with the IBO (Bouworde) International Volunteers Organization, and several others. In the same time a network of partner organizations that have participated in the centre's peacemaking projects appeared in Russia. Now it has been extended to include partners from the following regions of Russia: St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region, the Vologda, Novgorod, and Pskov Regions, the Karelian Autonomous Republic, and the city of Moscow.

Week of peace in St. Petersburg

In the framework of this article I would like to share about the two main peacemaking projects of Irenicon which demanded international involvement: the “Week of Peace in St. Petersburg” and the “Russian Routes for Peace and Peacemaking Camps”. They were organised in Russia in 2001, 2002, 2003, and are to be continued in 2004 and further.

“A Week of Peace” is a tool of peacemaking work has been used in many European cities and now also in some other regions of the world. This action is often the initiative of the Church. Various societies and organizations, such as parishes, schools, universities, political parties, public groups, and municipal authorities take part in it. Its purpose is attracting public attention to the problem of wars and violence and persuading people to act together in the interest of peace. As a rule, the “Week of Peace” leads to many other peacemaking initiatives and projects.

In our case, in St. Petersburg, we intend to make the First Peace Week a very open event. So that any interested organization could take part. Another task was to provide as much as possible information about the world public peacemaking movement and its tools. That is why we organized the First Week of Peace in St Petersburg in the form of an intensive course of lectures, seminars, and working meetings on peacemaking. A course was read and a series of seminars held on the international peacemaking movement, at several universities of St. Petersburg, 5-11th March 2001. The course was read by guest lecturer Ben Schennink, a member of the Peace Research Centre of the Nijmegen, Netherlands, Catholic University and a member of the Board of the Pax Christi International peacemaking movement. The complete title of the course of lectures and seminars was “Tolerance and Peacemaking: the Role of Religious and Public Organizations in the Creation of a Culture of Peace and Non-violence”.

The course on peacemaking was designed, first of all, to attract the attention of Christian and public organizations, teachers, and students to the problem of conflicts, violence, and wars. Those attending the course acquired a good knowledge of the non-governmental peace movement activities in many countries, international actions of protest against the development of various kinds of weaponry, and ongoing military conflicts.

The course included the basics of the contemporary theory of peacemaking and the discussion of such notions as “negative” or “positive” peace. While the first term means the absence of war, the second means active efforts on the part of both governmental and non-governmental entities directed at public stability and a fair social arrangement.

In his lectures, Ben Schennink especially emphasized the role and significance of public initiatives in the prevention of conflicts. How much can be done by local public organizations, provided the support of international community, was shown on the example of Columbia (Latin America) where a military confrontation between the government, insurgents, and armed criminal groups has continued for a number of years. On the initiative of local residents, certain settlements there were proclaimed demilitarised zones. The people say they want to be no part of any conflicts or take anyone’s side any more and demand that their position be respected. Supported actively by the Catholic Church, international community, and peacemaking organizations, people residing in such zones have proved capable of maintaining their neutral status. The number of such communities in Columbia is growing. Their successful experience is now being applied in other conflict-ridden places. Also, Ben Schennink lectured on the common theory of the organization of the “Week of Peace”. The attending students were awarded completion certificates.

Besides lectures, several seminars on peacemaking were held within the course. These were organized jointly with several city NGOs: “The Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg”, “The Memorial”, “The League of Women-voters”, etc. At the seminars, representatives from the Interchurch Partnership, aforementioned organizations, and the Pax Christi discussed their possible cooperation the future peacemaking projects.

Summarizing the results of the course, Ben Schennink and other organizers pointed out there being much interest for peacemaking among various strata of St. Petersburg’s residents, teachers, students, public figures, etc. It also helped to close the distance between St. Petersburg’s public

organizations working for the protection of human rights, opened the perspectives of an academic development of the topic of peacemaking by the city's universities, and showed the possibilities of developing corresponding academic programs for schools and colleges. New partners were found for the development of peacemaking programs.

The second Week of Peace in St. Petersburg was held from 1st-6th April 2002. It included conferences, seminars, roundtables, students' debates, "parliamentary debates", and lectures that were given at the City's several universities and public organisations. The central motif of all these events was "Challenges to Secular Religious and Theological Education after September 11, 2001: How New Threats to Peace May Be Prevented?" Scientists, and the students and staff of the city's 6 universities did their best to answer this question. The week ended in public hearings entitled "The Possibilities of Public Participation and the Role of Educational Organisations in Preventing and Resolving Conflicts and Creating a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence in Our Country". The public hearings were held in the city's House of Peace and Friendship. They were attended by representatives of public organisations, the city administration, secular and religious schools, and religious educational organisations. Reports from the public hearings and some other events held during the Week of Peace were presented on St. Petersburg's TV and by the "Blagovest-Info" all-Russian religious Internet news agency and some newspapers and magazines.

Like the previous year, the Week of Peace in 2002 was an international event. The following persons and organisation took an active part: Global Ministries of the Uniting Protestant Churches in the Netherlands represented by Mr. Laurence Hogebrink, Pax Christi International (Mr. Ben Schennink), and the Presbyterian United Nations Office, USA (Rev. Robert Smylie). These representatives gave lectures, delivered reports, and took part in discussions.

The principal subjects of discussion during the Week of Peace:

- The roles of Christian organisations in the international peacemaking movement.
- The role of Christian organisations in the United Nations Organisation.
- Religion and conflicts at peace lessons.
- A multipolar world or a new system of international relations? The problems of modern geopolitics.
- Confessions and ethnicities: education and the problems of ethnic and religious tolerance as discussed at the conference entitled "Education and the Problems of Inter-ethnic Communication".
- The expansion of the European Union: overcoming the consequences of cold war; the objectives of Churches.

Russian routes for peace and peacemaking camps

Another peacemaking tool that we found as inspiring and very effective was international exchange programmes that we call "Russian Routes for Peace and Peacemaking Camps". The idea came from the Pax Christi International peace movement. The tradition of Pax Christi International Peace Routes dates back to 1952. The purpose of the routes is the spreading of the ideas of peacemaking while uniting young people striving for peace. Over the past 10 years, Peace Routes have been organized by the Youth Forum of Pax Christi International. In 2000, the participants of the Peace Route looked into the situation in the Balkans and the neighbouring countries. They visited Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary, and Italy. In 1999, the international youth meeting took place in Jordan and in 1998, in Northern Ireland. Previously similar meetings were held in Portugal, Holland, Germany, Poland, and other European countries. In 2001, on the initiative of Irenicon centre the Peace Route came to Russia. International Peace Routes allow young people from various countries to pray together, exchange experiences, and become familiar with various cultures and religions. As experience shows, such meetings improve mutual understanding, lay basis for long-term friendships and cooperation, and promote the creation of a culture of peace and non-violence in the region.

For one week, 19th – 26th August 2001, the fifty participants of the Peace Route from 12 countries (Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Russia) visited and became familiar with the public and the church life of four Russian cities, St. Petersburg, Novgorod the Great, Pskov, and Moscow. The peacemakers were interested in the relations and the ways of cooperation between various social groups existing in Russia at the meeting point of the second and third millenniums. The foreign participants of the Peace Route repeatedly discussed the issue of the negative outlook on the life in Russia formed by Western mass media. This is why our task included not only the overcoming of stereotypes but also attempting a deeper penetration into the causes of conflicts in today's Russian society while trying to find the possible ways of reconciliation. Attention was also paid to the various forms of civic activities and those of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The mentioning of a large resonance the Peace Route caused on local levels is in order. Both local authorities and public organizations supported it. The same goes for regional mass media whose accounts of the peacemaking action were comprehensive. A number of important agreements concerning future cooperation were reached while the Peace Route continued. It was decided to involve more organizations and participants in Russian Peace Route the following year.

Some impressions of the participants of the Peace Route 2001 in Russian:

- “O my God, I have no idea what will happen in Russia! But never mind, it will be an adventure and just expect the best!!” - That's what I've said to myself a few days before the journey. So I took the chance and went to Russia and I just can say that this decision was one of the best I've had”, says Claudia Lui from Austria.
- Joera Mulders from the Netherlands writes: “I was sitting in the departure lounge of the Moscow airport, waiting for my plane to take me back to Holland. I felt awful, leaving my new friends, the way I talked with them, the atmosphere of the cities and the nature I had been walking in; leaving Russia. At that moment, I asked myself what had happened to me... The answer that came to me was that I had learned to listen to my heart”.
- Helena Naidinskaya from Russia writes: “On our way to Moscow we all sang throughout the night. We sang every song we knew and loved. Beatles, Jingle Bells, Shalom Aleihem, you name it! Surprisingly, throughout our seven days-long trip, the feelings of inner freedom and being all brothers and sisters never left us. This brother and sister hood was not of the slogan kind. It was real and spread through the bus we were riding on”.

Basing ourselves on the very positive experience of the first Peace Route we decided to make such international youth peacemaking activities in Russia a regular event. In 2002 Pax Christi International invited the Irenicon and the Interchurch Partnership “Apostolic City–Nevskaya Perspektiva” to become the responsible co-organizer of its official route in Russia. It took place on 7th – 18th August 2002.

This project was named “Transforming Hope into Reality in Russia” and it consisted of a seminar and four exposure visits, which gathered 60 young people from all over Europe in Russia. This activity was developed to help breaking down barriers and to enhance mutual understanding, which are basic conditions for reaching reconciliation. Participants came from Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the United States.

Central theme was the concepts of ‘citizenship’, of ‘belonging to’. Different facets of this topic were explored: the human rights situation, social problems such as drug addiction and historical aspects of the relationship between Russia and other European countries such as Germany. Whereas history might have divided people, today's challenges – such as drug addiction - are common for youth in all over Europe. The topics dealt with were selected in order to bring participants into dialogue with one another. This report will highlight the elements of the programme that were related to the topics of reconciliation and dealing with the past.

The seminar, which took place at the Caritas guest house in St Petersburg, started with a sociological research into the images participants had about Russia. For this research, participants were

divided into two groups: those coming from Russia, and those from abroad. It was interesting to notice the different opinions, images and stereotypes people have. Knowing each other better, and that includes knowing the images one has, is a fundamental basis to start a process of dialogue. This dialogue was continued during the whole seminars, in meetings with NGOs such as the “Soldiers Mothers of St Petersburg”, working on the human rights of conscripts in the Russian army and “Return Back”, helping former drug addicts to reintegrate into society. The participants also visited the Kresty prison, a drug rehabilitation centre, and a shelter for homeless people as well as churches of different denominations and the main mosque of St. Petersburg.

During a one-day excursion, all the participants visited the panorama of the siege of Leningrad. The guide, an older woman who had lived in St Petersburg during the siege, explained vividly the horrors of war. This was followed by a visit to the Sologubowka cemetery in Lezye, a small village near St. Petersburg. During the Second World War the German army heavily fortified this area because of the nearby airfield. The church tower was raised, as it would pinpoint their position to the Soviet troops. Among the villagers, there is still a lot of resentment about the past. When it was decided on an official level to bring all the German and Axis soldiers who died in this segment of the siege of Leningrad together, this ‘digging up’ of the past caused a lot of opposition among local inhabitants and Russian war veterans. When the cemetery is finished, more than 85, 000 young men from 13 countries will be buried there.

As an act of reconciliation, the Orthodox priest convinced the local parish to take care of the cemetery. He developed plans to build a peace park around the cemetery, a museum in the crypt under the Church (presently under reconstruction) on the Soviet repression of the Church and on the Second World War as well as an international meeting centre in the former German war hospital. During our visit to this cemetery, we were not alone. A group of old men and women who had fought on opposite sides in this area more than 60 years ago came again together, to remember those who died. It was emotionally moving to see how these people – for some on the German side it was the first time after the war that they visited Russia – overcame their fear and started talking with one another. A lively exchange between the participants of the seminar and the veterans followed. Afterwards, more exchanges followed inside the group, when the participants of South Eastern Europe joined in with their war experiences. It showed that in order to create a future of successful living together, one needs to understand the past.

Then the ‘routers’ went for the exposure visits. Over six days, the four groups of participants travelled exploring the current situation in Russia. The first group went to the cities Pskov and Novgorod and tried to grasp the civil and rural identity of this part of Russia. The second group explored the religious situation in Vologda, Totjma and Ustjug the Great. In Karelia – the third group – participants experienced what it means to be a citizen of an autonomous region within the Russian Federation. Finally, in a fourth group, the political situation was discussed during meetings in Moscow.

The topic of reconciliation was dealt with in each group, as participants were confronted with the often-painful history present in this area of Europe. The group that visited Moscow focused specifically on how Russia deals with its totalitarian past by meeting witnesses of this recent past. The group had an opportunity to talk directly with Mr Pristavkin, a writer and former dissident who is currently an advisor to president Putin. Mr Pristavkin, who used to be the chairman of the presidential clemency commission, received us in his office – which was once used by Kremlin officials who handed down death sentences. He exchanged openly with the participants about the Soviet past of Russia. Participants also visited the Sakharov museum, which keeps the memory of struggle of Andrei Sakharov alive.

The museum also presents the political history of Russia and the Soviet Union, with a big display on the Gulag archipelago. After the visit, there was an opportunity to meet people who are continuing

the work of Sakharov. A last visit on this topic was Memorial. This well-known Russian human rights organisation has as task the preservation of the memory of the severe political persecution in the recent past. Memorial is publishing “Books of Memory”, containing the lists of names of executed victims. They have also established a museum to preserve the memory of life in the work camps. Very special is the collection of hundreds of works of art made by prisoners while in the camps. This project brought a lot of impressions and experiences for the participants and the organizers.

Youth peacemaking international camp

In 2003 a new international exchange organized by Irenicon took place. From 2nd – 10th August in the vicinity of St. Petersburg, Russia, a Youth Peacemaking International Camp was open. Its participants looked into the topic entitled “The Impact of the Vestiges of WW2 on Russia’s Relations with Europe and the US: Overcoming Borderlines of the Past”. The camp was supported by Pax Christi Youth Forum and Pax Christi Germany.

There were 26 young participants from 6 countries, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States of America, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Russia. While studying the vestiges of the war, they concentrated on one of its the most tragic episodes, the 900 day-long siege of Leningrad. The participants spent 8 days travelling over Russia’s Northwest, visiting the most significant memorial places connected with the history of the siege, such as the Nevsky Spot, Sinyavino Heights, Pulkovo Heights, etc. They also went to St. Petersburg, Novgorod and traversed the Novgorod Region. All their trips began in the village of Lezye near St. Petersburg, in the memorial Peace Park where the camp was set up. As mentioned above, the Peace Park memorial includes a cemetery of German soldiers who died in the war, a church with a Christian Orthodox parish and several sectors where monuments commemorating the tragedy of the Second World War have been placed.

The program of activities of the camp included an introductory seminar and interviews with local war veterans, members of local administrations, history students participating in search parties, priests, and Russian Orthodox parishioners. One of the most important objectives was assisting in the development of the Peace Park as unique for Russia centre of reconciliation and understanding between nations. In order to achieve this, meetings, discussions, and interviews with local war veterans were videotaped and everything was photographed. All these materials will be very soon used in the creation of the interactive website of the Peace Park. The site will be a virtual copy of the park, a virtual peacemaking memorial, and a place for discussions concerning peace and reconciliation all over the world. There will be Russian, German, and English versions of the website. It will feature an interactive map of the Peace Park and related locations. By clicking on certain spots on the map, visitors will be able to view photos and video clips and read the texts of interviews with war veterans and the participants of the peacemakers’ camp. Also, visitors will be able to contribute their own stories related to WW2 or their personal experiences in reconciliation. This will make the website a meeting place for people from various countries to whom peacemaking work is important.

Besides gathering materials for the website, another, or may be even the most important objective we had was educating the participants and allowing them to have new experiences. Visiting former battlefields where, until quite recently, one could literally step on WW2 unexploded artillery shells and weapons, talking to veterans and priest Vyacheslav Kharinov, the head of the Peace Park, and numerous discussions made indelible impressions on the participants. For them, the most significant result of being in the camp was discovering for themselves, all anew, the true depth of the tragedy of that war.

The seminars, meetings and discussions that took place showed that today's youth in our countries know very little about it. For the past 15 years, in Russia and in the other countries of the former Soviet bloc, this topic has been carefully left alone. Christina, a participant from Ukraine, told us that in their schools, up to the 9th grade, children study history before WW2 only. In the 10th grade, they pick up the study from right after the war. This is, most likely, due to the fact that those putting school curricula together simply have no idea what should be their position toward the war. Teaching history the way it was done in the Soviet Union is no longer possible, while no new attitudes toward WW2 events have just yet formed in the society. The societies of other countries, especially the young, also need to re-evaluate their role in the past war. Konstantin, a young man now doing an alternative military service in Russia, said that his generation did not want to see the war through the eyes of the fathers whose views were overburdened with stereotypes.

Summing up the program of the peacemaking camp in the peace Park in Lezye, the participants decided that the studying, within this program, of the impact of the vestiges of the Second World War on the modern young living in the countries that fought in it should be continued. Before the collapse of the Soviet regime, while the world was still divided into two opposing camps, there were very few doubts as to the attitudes toward WW2. Yet the world has changed and those attitudes have become outdated. The Second World War ties all its participants together. It is our common past, which we can not simply forget or keep silent about. We must re-think and re-evaluate that past and form new ideology-free attitudes toward it. This task is one of the challenges the peacemaking youth movement now faces.

Challenges facing ecumenism in Russia

The above described projects form a good basis for ecumenical cooperation in relation to the peacemaking programs in the theological education and orientation of future priests as well as of laypeople leading Christian communities and movements. However, at these time, ecumenical activities as such, that is, interdenominational cooperation is among the most important activities of Christian peacemakers. Until now, the mass consciousness of our extremely secularized society dwells on not just false religious and ethnic stereotypes, promoting hatred and even criminal offences, but also on false Christian confessional stereotypes.

Quite regretfully, until now, ecumenical atmosphere in Russia is not according to our Christian ideals. Until now, interdenominational tensions and aggression are not infrequent. Certain Orthodox newspapers promote the idea that ecumenism is among the worst heresies of the 20th century and call Christian denominations that have long since joined the ecumenical movement – sects, and so on. This is why Christian peacemakers consider ecumenical enlightenment as their principal objective. Today, productive interdenominational dialogue is unimaginable without progressing in inter-confessional Christian cooperation.

The meetings in January and February 2004 of representatives from St. Petersburg's various Christian schools showed that these theological schools are prepared for active cooperation and would like to renew their programs and adjust them towards developing the peacemaking aspects of theological education. This was discussed during the week of prayers for Christian unity, which, in 2004, was held under the motto "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*" (John 14, 27); during a special seminar on inter-confessional relations organized by the Interchurch Partnership on the initiative of the public movement "Gorbachev Project: East – West"; and during the seminar held in the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the lifting of the siege from the city of Leningrad.

It is also important to note that peacemaking was given a special attention during the consultation on ecumenical theological education that took place in St. Petersburg in October 2003. The consultation was hosted by the office of the program Ecumenical Theological Education in Central and Eastern Europe of the World Council of Churches. The Irenicon Peacemaking Center made a suggestion to include peacemaking in the course of missiology, which was supported by all participants.

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