

Spring 2011

Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

WOMEN'S JOURNEYS: PROGRESS AND PERIL



COVER ART

"Dancers of Praise" by Trish Williams.

Williams, based in Chicago, is a fiber artist whose work has been exhibited in many national venues.

About the "Dancers of Praise" quilt, she writes: "This piece was inspired by my love of dance and how, as a child, I saw dance performed in the Missionary Baptist Church services I attended. As I became older I learned that dance is part of many religious and cultural ceremonies as a form of worship. The purple used in the quilt represents the highest form of spirituality, and the red represents the 'blood of life' that flows through us all. The Adrinka symbol, Gye Nyame, on the middle figure signifies the omnipotence of God. This great panorama of creation dates back to time immemorial. No one lives who saw its beginning and no one will live to see its end, except God. This symbol comes from Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The white hankies were always a part of these dance rituals, and I often wonder why they were used. Are the dancers fanning the flames of the Spirit?"

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INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY

The photography featured in this *Reflections* is a sample from a recent New York exhibition that honors the many ways in which women shape the twenty-first century world.

Entitled "A Woman's World," the public exhibit in March was sponsored by Professional Women Photographers (PWP), featuring the work of some of its 245 member photographers (www.pwponline.org).

"Today women have equal opportunities, working in many spheres once limited to men, even rising to leadership positions," the exhibition organizers write. "But in many parts of the world, including in the United States, gender separation and inequality remains deeply ingrained, both culturally and politically."

The exhibit captures a slice of the vast circumstances of women's lives today – also their courage, flexibility, and endurance whether at work raising families or remaking the far-flung world. Thirty-one photographers showed their work, providing written commentary and context. Here's a sample of those featured in *Reflections*.

"I was in Machu Picchu for a wedding, where I found this amazing Peruvian woman (the mother of the bride)," Fran Eber says regarding "Joyous" (page 4). "The joy in her face captured the essence of what was to be an incredible spiritual journey. We traveled through remote parts of Peru to reach the sacred Andean highland where the wedding ceremony was performed. This was just days before the 2007 Peruvian earthquake ..."

"The market place in Danang, Vietnam is busy, crowded, and noisy with lots of activity," Bobbie Pearson writes, describing "The Lunch Meeting" (page 48). "Somehow these women found a quiet corner and appeared to be discussing a very serious matter. The expressions on their faces and the array of hats caught my eye."

"'Open Door' captures one of the infinite multi-tasking techniques done by teachers constantly," explains photographer Meryl Meisler (see page 20). "Yvette is at her door, paper in her hand, discussing a 'private matter' with one child while another approaches. The door is open so she can keep a watchful ear and eye out for the rest of the class. Teaching, long considered a 'woman's profession,' is an art, science, and pillar of civilization."

Reflections is grateful to PWP and its member photographers for permitting us to reprint work from the exhibit. We especially thank photographers Sindi Schorr and Catherine Kirkpatrick for their assistance.

Portrait of Choreographer Isabel Gotzkowsky
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WOMEN'S JOURNEYS: PROGRESS AND PERIL



From the Dean's Desk



Harold W. Attridge
The Reverend Henry L. Slack Dean of Yale Divinity School
& Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament

This issue of *Reflections* is inspired by a year-long celebration of eight decades of women at Yale Divinity School. The issue both attempts to review the early struggles and triumphs of women in ministry, including developments in feminist theology, and incorporates new voices and directions of discourse for women of faith today.

As women alums returned to YDS for our week of Convocation and Reunions last fall, they shared their stories with us – poignant stories of hope and expectation, stories of frustration and challenge and celebration as they confronted deep-seated prejudices and broke through what looked to be formidable barriers. There were recollections about the handful of brave women students who defied the often-hostile culture of the all-male divinity classroom in the 1930s. Their graduations were but the first steps in their journeys to enter vocations in church and academy, a world that was, at the time, unwilling to imagine or accept the wisdom and leadership of women. As the result of hard-won efforts to remove such obstacles, women today can claim important leadership roles both in congregational life and the wider world. Women can be proud of what they have accomplished, even as we all ponder the work yet to be done to eliminate the exploitation of women and to achieve full equality.

Among the leaders of change were our first women faculty colleagues, Margaret Farley and the late Letty Russell. Gifted teachers and scholars, they inspired and guided generations of students, both women and men, always engaging the challenge of

securing women's rightful role in church and society and lending vital leadership to nurturing the field of feminist theology. Their spirit presides over this *Reflections* issue, which Margaret has helped to shape as our guest editor.

Contributors to this volume address a range of issues affecting women today – from matters of war and peace, economic justice, and the role of women in society, to the theological and exegetical foundations of our religious commitment to the rights of women. The contributions include those of faculty, alumnae, and friends who are actively involved around the globe to confront and remedy the structures and attitudes that still oppress our sisters. We hope that this issue of *Reflections* will both honor the past, while challenging the future.

Harold W. Attridge

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Ideas for a Better Gendered World

By Margaret A. Farley

Ideas matter. How we think about things, about persons, about states of affairs, makes a difference.

What we *think* about key events in our lives – such as aging and dying – shapes our experience of the events. Ideas can stabilize our lives, and they can disrupt them. Ideas can hold the world captive, and ideas can change the world for better or for worse.

Ideas are not generated only by theorizing, although theory can yield, reinforce, or counter some ideas. Ideas can also be awakened, expanded, transformed, as well as dissipated, distorted, lost, through particular encounters with concrete persons and situations. The same is true of encounters with newly revelatory texts, new empirical evidence, new appreciation of community or tradition. In the face of ideas that oppress and repress and distort women's lives, women (and men) have risen to form alliances and movements of challenge. They have also lived on ideas that free their spirits, energize their desires, form and sustain (and sometimes break) relationships.

Embodied Engagement

Some feminists over the last century have been theory-phobic, even idea-phobic, a response to the theory-driven distortions of women's "nature" and in general the falsification of women's experience. Others have been preoccupied with complex concepts and theories in ways that have appeared inaccessible to ordinary women. Fortunately, neither of these approaches has finally left women without resources for the pursuit of self-understanding, social analysis, and concerted action against discrimination on the basis of gender. "Ideas" are not necessarily only "cerebral" or abstract. They can be genuine insights that involve affective knowing and embodied engagement with concrete reality. A knowing love, like a loving knowledge, reaches more

deeply into the heart of what we know and love, nurturing both understanding and action.

This issue of *Reflections* celebrates eight decades of women students at YDS. It charts the journey of women in churches, society, and the world, looking for signs of progress or ongoing peril. Here are stories, questions, concerns, of women in ministry – ordained and not ordained – in parishes, families, schools, agencies, organizations. Here are the sightings of relevant benchmarks and trajectories by Biblical scholars, theologians, ethicists, linguists, social historians. Here are voices from diverse cultural and historical locations, telling of new and old ideas, renewed loves, sustained actions.

Whatever factors have shaped women's history – at YDS, in the churches, in the world – gender itself is implicitly or explicitly central. Or more accurately, the "idea" of gender (the interpretation, the meaning of gender) has been significantly central. For most of human history, the content of this idea has been taken for granted – a given if there ever was one. It reflects the default belief that sex, male or female, qualifies – that is, defines and confines – every human being and every individual human identity. And the qualification goes deep – not only to human bodies but to humans as embodied spirits. Sex, it has been thought, divides the human species in utterly important ways. By reason of sexual attributes, all humans grow into a gender identity – not only male or female but boy or girl, man or woman. This identity, moreover, is anchored in a highly gendered interpretation of the universe, and in centuries of gender-ordered human societies, kinship structures, religious associations.

Yet today it is commonplace to challenge the historical gendering of humanity, particularly when

it entails a wholesale differentiation of roles and responsibilities along questionable gender lines. Indeed, so contested and destabilized has the meaning of gender become in the past three decades, especially in scholarly circles, that theological ethicist Susan Frank Parsons fears we have come to the end of ethics – seeing, finally, how intertwined our notions of “goodness” are with often unfounded assumptions about gender.¹

Challenges to previous understandings of gender, and to their enforcement in social practice, take many forms. Most of them stem from a new awareness of the role of social construction in the shaping of the meaning of gender. It is not gender that shapes institutions and practices, but institutions and practices that shape gender. Social construction is particularly evident in stereotypes of the “feminine” and the “masculine,” as if being passive or active, weak or strong, concerned with compassion or justice, were human attributes restricted universally to one sex or the other. Social construction is also exhibited in the seemingly arbitrary gender assignment of roles – from the variously gender-assigned task of milking cows (in contemporary African tribes), to gender-designated appropriateness for leadership in church and society (still in contemporary Western cultures).

Virtue and Gender

In other words, rationales for what counts as virtue in persons by reason of their gender, as well as rationales for familial and societal gendered divisions of labor, have become more and more suspect. The same is true for relational structures in family, church, and society marked by gendered hierarchies. Even revered notions of psychological gender “complementarity” seem counter-factual when they are relegated to so-called “opposite” sex relations and overlooked in same-sex relationships. A complacent translation of cultural interpretations of gender into the language of the order of nature has been effectively slowed by those whose experience is not thereby adequately taken into account.

Women (and men) have internalized for centuries the gendered self-understandings articulated by the dominant voices in their cultures. Yet a growing sense of dissonance between established gender identity requirements and actual experience, especially of women, has led women to new insights, new possibilities, even new capabilities. Economic and cultural shifts have reinforced the sense of dissonance, even as biological and neurological sciences have begun to call into question previous assumptions about gendered bodies and minds. As mul-

tiple gender forms (intersex, transsex, transgender, ambiguous gender, “third” gender) are empirically discovered, it becomes even more difficult to sustain a monolithic connection between anatomy and gender. New insights yield new claims for gender equality, but also new respect for gender diversity. Ideas have changed, insights have expanded, new questions have emerged. Still, as many of the essays in this issue of *Reflections* suggest, the last word may not yet be in.

A Wiser World

Insight into the importance of social construction for understandings of gender undergirds the need for deconstruction, revaluation, and reconstruction of its meanings. After all, it is precisely because some construals of gender have been harmful and unjust that the challenges to its meanings have been raised. When we take some aspects of our lives for granted, it is only when we experience pain that we have to think about them anew, or perhaps for the first time. This signals that the goal of *thinking* about gender is by no means detached from real-life experience or from the reality of human relationships. Its goal is not mere deconstruction but more adequate understandings and more truthful gender practices.

In the end we may see that gender matters yet does not matter; and ideas about gender matter more, but also less, than we may previously have thought. Gender ought not to matter in ways that divide us, that bar us from full participation in the human community, or tempt us to judge one another as inappropriately gendered beings. Ideas about gender ought to be let go insofar as they are based in discredited stereotypes, or insofar as they sustain gendered hierarchies. Yet gender still matters, certainly in relations of intimate love, where everything about a person matters. And gender analysis continues to be important in uncovering discrimination, exclusion, or neglect on the basis of gender. Sorting out how gender matters and does not matter is a practical but also ideational task that must continue, then, in the service of justice and human well-being, on the way to a wiser gendered world.

Margaret A. Farley '70 M.Phil. '73 Ph.D., Gilbert L. Stark Professor Emerita of Christian Ethics, has been a mentor and advisor to generations of students during her forty-year association with YDS. Her most recent book is *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (Continuum, 2006).

Notes

1. Susan Frank Parsons, *The Ethics of Gender* (Blackwell, 2002), pp. 4-5.

Gifts from the Desert

By Talitha Arnold

The wilderness and dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.

(Isaiah 35:1-2)

For most of my ordained life, I've served in the high desert of Northern New Mexico. I grew up in Arizona with a desert botanist for a mother. When I think of images for being a woman in ministry, the desert comes naturally to mind.

There are lots of parallels between life in the desert and ministry as a woman. Learning to live with scarcity tops the list. In a sermon Margaret Farley

One can't survive the occasional dry seasons as a woman in parish ministry without being rooted – in prayer, in the Bible, in friendship, in an ongoing relationship with the mystery and power of God.

once described women in ministry as “standing on the edge of the world with no protective covering.” Women still often find themselves there.

Yet as scientists know, deserts can, for all their limits, be places of amazing abundance and diversity. The Bible affirms a similar truth. Deserts can be the place where, like Hagar, we encounter God directly or, like Sarah, we hear news that makes us laugh until we cry. In the desert, Jesus confronted the Tempter but was also comforted by the angels.

Lessons from the desert are many. Here are some I've learned as a woman in ministry in a land of little rain.

1. Put down roots. Desert tumbleweeds spring up quickly, but with their shallow, skinny roots they dry up and blow away once the rains stop. In contrast, saguaros – the giant cacti of the desert – can last for centuries because their root systems are as broad

and deep as the height of the plant above.

One can't survive the occasional dry seasons as a woman in parish ministry without being rooted – in prayer, in the study and delight of the Bible, in friendship, in an ongoing relationship with the mystery and power of God.

2. Appreciate complexity, especially your own. Life in the desert seldom fits into neat categories. The spiniest cactus provides the safest shelter for nests.

To be a woman minister requires living into the complexity of one's own life, particularly as it pertains to traditional roles of women and men. The day after a senior minister told me to live more into my “feminine side,” a church member said he liked my sermons because “I preached like a man.” Getting caught between a rock and a hard place happens a lot in the desert.

When I sit with a grieving widow, organize a capital drive, or speak at the State Legislature, am I living into my femininity, my masculinity, or my just plain God-given humanity?

3. Learn to adapt. Some of the most creative life forms on earth are found in desert places, like the cactus with ribs that expand and contract depending on rainfall.

As a woman in ministry, you have to bloom where you're called, like Cheryl Cornish '83 M.Div., who revived a declining downtown church in Memphis with new worship and outreach, or Marie Fortune '76 M.Div., who created a ministry beyond the church to advocate against domestic and sexual violence.

4. But also advocate for change. To survive the desert heat, sometimes you have to build a shelter.

Rainfall is simply too scarce, the sun too hot. The church, whether locally or denominationally, is the one place where discrimination against women is still legal. To be the ministers God calls us to be, we need to change the landscape of injustice despite the severity of conditions confronting us.

5. See the interconnectedness. Desert life involves unusual partnerships among species. Young saguaros need the shade of palo verdes to survive the desert sun. In turn, the giant cacti provide fruit, nests, and shade for all manner of birds, animals, and plants.

I've depended on unlikely partners in ministry, colleagues who reached across race, gender, and creed. I'm deeply grateful for people like the Catholic sister who told me to "empower the priest in yourself so you can empower the priest in others"; the African American UCC leader who reminded me never to let the world's "no" drown out God's "yes"; the longtime friend who became the first Hispanic priest to head Santa Fe's Cathedral. Our shared experiences of "ministry on the margins" have transcended our differences and made me a better minister.

6. Know the rock that gave you birth. Desert lands are ancient lands, measured in geologic eras. The sparse vegetation lets you see how one layer of rock builds on older ones.

At a General Synod a few years ago, I watched as the moderator, a young clergywoman, led the national meeting. "She *knows* she has a right to be there," I thought with awe (and some jealousy). Then I realized that the women alums of the 1940s and '50s probably thought the same in 1980 when they watched me and my classmates preach in Marquand Chapel. Like the layers of desert rock, each generation of women in ministry is founded on the work and courage of previous ones. Like that rock, the strength of any one woman comes from those many preceding layers.

7. Look for the blessings. A spring hidden among boulders, a cooling summer thunderstorm, a glorious flower pushing forth from a spiny cactus ... deserts are filled with surprising graces. So is the work of a woman in ministry. There's the male parishioner who initially isn't sure about a "girl preacher," but fifteen years into your ministry he tells you, and the church, that you've convinced him otherwise. There's the older women who "get it" from the beginning. There's the younger male colleague who affirms your leadership.

It's dangerous to romanticize life in the searing desert. These days, the same is true of ministry. Despite numerous advances in the last decades, ministry for women has become, in many ways, more difficult. In Santa Fe in 1987, three other women were serving churches. Now there's only one. In the dwindling number of churches large enough to hire senior pastors, women are still outnumbered by men two to one.

Along with the challenge of getting the church to recognize women's leadership, we now face the equal challenge of getting the culture to acknowledge the church. Recently *Newsweek* profiled "150 Women Who Shake the World," an impressive list of political leaders, doctors, lawyers, teachers, human

The church, whether locally or denominationally, is the one place where discrimination against women is still legal.

rights advocates, and celebrities – but not a single woman pastor, rabbi, nun, sensei, theologian, or any other spiritual leader.

There's no denying that in desert times, life and ministry get stripped down to basics. But that's when, like Hagar or Jesus, we can learn what's truly important and what truly gives life. Parish ministry has forced me to go deeper into my faith and into my relationship with God. I didn't choose to be a parish minister any more than I chose to be a woman. But I am grateful for both callings. Most of all, I am grateful to the God who led me into this landscape of being a woman in ministry, and who still challenges me to find its blessings and offer its gifts to others.

The Rev. Talitha Arnold '80 M.Div. has been minister of United Church of Santa Fe, NM, for twenty-four years. Ordained in the United Church of Christ since 1980, she is also author of Worship for Vital Congregations (Pilgrim Press, 2007). She served as chair of the "Eight Decades of Women at YDS" women's reunion last fall.



Thinking Out Loud About Feminism

By Kate M. Ott

Welcome to this table. I'm glad you were able to accept my invitation to share a meal and a conversation. We're here to gather our thoughts and experiences of feminism. Let us share food, ideas, second thoughts, hopes. Before we start, can we all see each other? Gathering at this round table, I believe we have the foundation we need for beginning our conversation – that we all see each other.

Each of you is here because you have been formative in my understanding of feminism and commitment to feminist ideals. I want to honor your spirit, hear your voices again, check in, take stock, get clarity. As many of you know, I grew up Roman Catholic, have studied ethics, feminist and liberation theologies, and worked as an activist for sexuality education, LGBT inclusion, and reproductive rights. I'm a wife and a mother. You know me from the classroom, social service programs, or from my church communities.

What I'd like to hear from you tonight are your latest thoughts on our subject. Do you call yourself a feminist? What does that mean to you? How do you see yourself and your work related to feminism today?

"Well, I'm probably the oldest person at this table, so I'll begin," says B. "Yes, I proudly call myself a feminist and have so for over forty years. The consciousness-raising groups that were important to me in the 1970s helped me see I wasn't the only woman who felt like my college education wasn't supposed to go to waste just because I got married. I knew I could do all the things men were doing and probably better. From that point on, I have dedicated myself to working for girls' education so they could join whatever profession they wanted – wear pants, play sports, run a board meeting, start a business – you know what I mean – and to always make sure they are giving back to feminism's best hopes by making it possible for other girls and women to do this too."

Waiting politely, but clearly looking for the perfect break in conversation to speak, D responds, "I guess I see things a bit differently. I'm not that much younger than you are, and we have both been professionals in a man's world, though I am in the academy, not a business office. My feminist and educational journeys coincided. I guess I started out wanting to have all the things men have. But I realized, rather painfully at times, that 'equal' doesn't

"Why are we always defining ourselves in comparison to men, and which men are we talking about?" says T, setting down her fork.

have to mean 'the same.' I have focused my efforts more on deconstructing gender in order to free women from the oppression they suffer. If we could just get to a place where gender didn't matter – and race too – then we could imagine a world where justice is possible. We would see each other as God intended – human beings, equally created in God's image."

"Why are we always defining ourselves in comparison to men, and which men are we talking about?" says T, setting down her fork. "Men don't sit around wondering how they aren't like women or don't have women's rights. And the men I know aren't all that privileged. As a Womanist, I want feminism to mean more than just 'being like a white

man.’ My Womanist vision for feminists is one that helps all men and boys see how sexism hurts them too. It should commit us, in the face of poverty and racism, to do God’s work by standing against oppression in all its forms.”

With a sigh, *L* admits, “I have to say, Kate, I’m not sure why you invited me. You know I think feminism is pointless. It’s based on this narrow idea of what a woman is or wants. I just got married and I want to be a stay-at-home mom. I don’t want men to become something different. What’s wrong with gender roles if you freely choose them? In our house, my husband makes the money, mows the lawn, and fixes things. That’s what my husband wants to do, and I want to focus on the kids and the house. Somehow that makes me a failure in the eyes of ‘real’ feminists. But it’s not like anyone is

“Ugh, I’m honestly tired of these conversations,” retorts *M*, setting her glass down.

forcing me into this choice. Wasn’t feminism supposed to give women more choices and free them to decide for themselves?” says *L*, reaching for the broken loaf of bread resting in a basket at the middle of the table.

“Ugh, I’m honestly tired of these conversations,” retorts *M*, setting her glass down. “Women who have racial, economic, and educational privilege still haven’t figured out that their brand of feminism isn’t relevant to most women in the world. Let’s be realistic. Women achieving access and equality with men means only predominately white, First World women getting more education and better jobs, while blacks, Asians, and Latinas are paid to do the household labor, low-paying service jobs, and childcare in the U.S. The global picture is even worse. Those of you who have spoken so far might say, ‘That’s not what I meant or intended.’ But look at the reality. Feminism can’t just be about getting more or erasing who we are as women. It has to be about some of us getting less and seeing our racial, geographic, economic, and political differences clearly.

She continues: “My expression of feminism reflects how my experience of race, culture, citizenship, and economic standing jars white, First World feminism out of a one-size-fits-all model. I am broadening and reclaiming the use of the term feminist, without modifiers, to describe my work. Even though, I get lumped into a term like ‘global

south’ or a continental category of African feminist, as if all Africans are the same, or Asians or South Americans for that matter. We come from specific countries with regional and religious differences that are extremely important to shaping our understanding of feminism. I’m going to concentrate on acting for justice and that’s feminism to me.”

To which *J* nods and agrees, “Talk about one-size-fits-all. I guess I would say I’m a feminist, but I’d add queer – queer feminist. Seriously, we need to get rid of the categories of women and men altogether: gender is a performance, and sex has more than two categories. Plus, you can alter them, change them, if they don’t fit who you really are. It has been feminist and queer mentors during seminary and in my religious tradition who have taught me to define who I am on my own terms.” Taking a bite, chewing slowly, *J* concludes, “God made us, but we have to figure out what that means to us individually. For me to express who I know God made me to be, I have to change my appearance, and maybe even my body, to make others see what I feel. I don’t think most feminists have thought enough about what to do if ‘women’ and ‘women’s bodies’ aren’t the tie that binds the movement. I’m here to make sure we do ask that question and work together to find an answer.”

As the quietest one at the table thus far, not a usual situation for me, I guess it is my turn to speak. As you know, I proudly name myself a feminist. I have not always fit neatly into the images created by feminist theories or feminist advocates. Like some of you, as a U.S., white, educated, upper-class woman, I have received privileges from feminist struggles fought before me. As a Christian commit-

With a sigh, *L* admits, “I have to say, Kate, I’m not sure why you invited me. You know I think feminism is pointless.”

ted to Jesus’ call to social justice, I am constantly challenged by the failures of past and present feminist movements especially as they pertain to racism, colonialism, heterosexism, and poverty. Modifiers to the word feminism help remind us that we have different vantage points that lead to different experiences. I do believe that language and naming matter. If I say I am a white feminist, it reminds me that my experience of race affects how I experience injustice and inequality. It suggests I have a particular entry point out of which my advocacy for justice begins.

How each of you regards feminism influences what feminism means to me. Your witness challenges me to keep asking questions about the future of feminist movements and theory. In my experience, feminism is a justice-seeking praxis – action and reflection, theory and movements, mutually informing each other. Feminism most often starts with the real-life experience of women, oppressed because an individual, group, or society views them as inferior and then seeks to enforce its ferocity by objectification, control, and domination. We know sexism can take relatively subtle forms, such as

Taking a bite, chewing slowly, J concludes, “God made us, but we have to figure out what that means to us individually.”

lower salaries for women than men. Or it erupts as domestic and sexual violence in our bedrooms, homes, and churches. Or it persists ruthlessly in a world of poverty, where a woman dies every minute in childbirth because of a lack of health services.

The church is no stranger to gendered and sexual oppression. One of my first moments of feminist awakening was in relation to my faith and church. As a young Roman Catholic school girl, I proudly told my grandmother that this was the year I got to be an altar girl. To which she replied: it's a shame what's become of the church. My joy was, to her, dreaded confirmation that the patriarchal sanctity of the church was slowly crumbling. I'm waiting for further decay. Theological truth, ethical analysis, and experiential evidence have yet to convince the Roman Catholic hierarchy that women can be priests as well as altar girls! This is only a minor incident in a long line of theologically justified sexism that keeps our churches from living into the fullness of God's calling.

Feminism recognizes sexism as an entry point for understanding how oppression and injustice operate. But feminism must go beyond models of equality that value sameness between the sexes above all, especially when the sameness means aiming to be like white, First World, educated men. My hope for feminism, particularly in our churches and denominations, is *not* that we reach a point where gender, sex, race, religion, and culture no longer matter. They do matter. My hope is that we reach a point where who we are in our unique individual and collective identities matters so fervently that we seek justice because of our differences, not in spite of them or in order to move beyond them.

If feminist movements and theories are to make a lasting contribution to that conversation and vision, then feminism will need each of us around this table to be willing to share a meal, see each other, disagree, and stay a while.

I hope you will come to dinner next week. There are extra chairs. Please feel free to bring someone who is not here.

Kate Ott '00 M.A.R. is deputy director of the Religious Institute in Westport, CT, an organization that promotes a progressive religious vision of sexual morality, justice, and healing in congregational and public life. A lecturer at YDS and at Drew Theological Seminary, she is co-editor of Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference (Westminster John Knox, 2009). She is also author of Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice (2009, Religious Institute) and co-editor of the forthcoming Keeping the Light: Scholarship, Activism, and the Next Generation (2011, Palgrave).

TO DO LIST By Kathi Wolfe

Make coffee.
Sort socks.
Walk
around the universe
and back.
Meet and greet
the human condition.
Pack picnic lunch
for your ghost.
Reshape the Moonlight Sonata.
Go to therapy –
play Monopoly
with sorrow,
musical chairs
with grief.
Write a poem
that sends
all the other poems
to the nearest bar
for a drink.
As an afterthought –
eat fire.



Female Cop
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The Pulse of God: An Odyssey of Empowerment

By Joan Cooper Burnett

I'm often asked about my experience as an African American woman in ministry. The listeners wait to hear a story of oppression about being a woman in church leadership. Their expectations give me a feeling of trepidation. Yes, there are stories to tell of gender bias. Yes, black women have been denied "pulpit power" in African American and other communities. Yet my experience as a black woman and ordained minister yields a different set of life lessons, a message of liberation by the power of God over resentments and obstacles, the power of God to grant vocation and courage.

Being an African American woman has empowered me to empower others. Overcoming the racism of growing up in the segregated South, then overcoming sexual harassment and racial discrimination in higher education, corporate America, and the church, have given me clarity about this life and a calling to encourage other women. The challenge I've faced has always been bigger than gender – it's race, then gender – but in the end I don't rely on a particular "ism" or agenda. My confidence is in the God who keeps and sustains me.

After graduating from Yale Divinity School, I served as the first African American senior pastor at a predominantly Anglo Baptist church in New England. Before offering me the position, the search committee wanted to know the "ramifications of calling a black pastor." I was told there was a fear that "the church might become black," and the worship style would change if they hired me.

An Embarrassing Reality

When we hear talk of women in ministry, the focus is usually on gender bias. We don't generally discuss the racism that women of color experience in church leadership. I guess it is an embarrassing reality when believers profess the gospel, "the good

news," but are not producing the gospel.

Although I knew it would be a turbulent road to take, I prayed, "God, if You are the One opening these doors, I want to keep walking through them." I accepted that pastorate and served there four years, paving the way for another African American pastor to serve there. I did what I had the power to do and

Women testified faithfully in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament. At the empty tomb, they were there. In churches today, they are there.

turned the rest of my cares over to God. I learned the importance of loving from the heart and the true meaning of offering the grace I freely receive.

Yes, women experience discriminations. We'll always face people (women and men both) who object to who we are or argue what we should be doing. But our lives are greater than the opinions and speculations of others; our lives are more than the sum of their parts. When you know God, feel the pulse of God, hear the voice of God, have a relationship with God, you aren't moved by what others say or do.

I want to be clear, I'm not simply saying, "just put your trust in God and everything will be okay." God is a spirit, so God works through us. We are to put our faith in action. There are times when our faith in God will cause us to stand up for what we believe and put everything on the line. "The ultimate mea-

This century, I believe, we will witness a turning: women will be placed in power, and God will be pleased.

sure of a wo/man is not where s/he stands in moments of comfort and convenience," wrote Martin Luther King Jr. in *Strength to Love* in 1963, "but where s/he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

The experience of being black in America has given me the tenacity to fight for justice, but also the compassion to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, a burning desire to save the children and liberate women. I find this compassion in the teachings of Jesus. There are no Twelve Steps of recovery for a society that needs to own up to its prejudices, no seven steps to happiness in a society desperately searching for it. The primary thing must be love. As Jesus said, on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets – to love God with everything you've got, and to love your neighbor as yourself. When you truly love, you won't have trouble working out the rest.

I come from a family where women are educated; my grandmother was a math teacher, my mother is a Tennessee state representative. All three generations suffered at the hands of Jim Crow laws and cruelty, but as black women we are agents of purpose and power, culture and community, playing a major role in African American life and in the life of the church. It's a well-known saying in the African American community: "If it wasn't for the women, you wouldn't have a church." In the black community, but in the larger world too, women are the ones who make things happen. I feel the contributions of my foremothers every day: we all stand on their shoulders.

A Message of Liberty

I grew up in Memphis, went to college in Tennessee, graduate school in Boston, spent twenty-two years in business, attended YDS and have since served as a senior pastor and college chaplain. As the years have unfolded, my vocation has been made clearer to me. The message I hope to convey to women or men, students or professors, is a message of liberty, the freedom from every sort of oppression, the freedom of living in God.

That message of liberty applies to college cam-

puses, where a spirit of secularism so often tries to tyrannize and silence the faith of young people. I often remind my colleagues and students, "No one should be in fear or feel intimidated to say she or he is Christian, especially in America."

That message of liberty applies to young girls who look like me, who are demonized as welfare mothers or sexualized as objects, and whose lives are devalued with scorn and disregard. That message of liberty applies to women everywhere whose lives are devalued or made into objects of men's pleasure.

The message of liberty also applies to black women in ministry who still face resistance from church leaders and pulpits: may you connect with your rich history of faith and achievement, and find that voice to do what God has given you to do, never oppressing others or allowing others to dictate who you are or what you may become. You have been given your charge, now go ye therefore being and making disciples of all nations.

Women have always been with God, embracing special roles in ministry. They have been faithful. They testified faithfully in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament. At the empty tomb, they were there. In churches today, they are there.

Sisters, walk in the public dignity and the supreme authority given to you by God as Deborah leading the people to victory. Stand in the integrity of Vashti and say no, refuse unjust commands when others ask of you that which will not edify God. Continue in the courage of Esther bringing the ultimate triumph of truth and justice, defending others. Pray and fast as Hannah, seek the wisdom of God as the Queen of Sheba, operate in the faith of Mary the mother of Jesus, and worship in the spirit of the woman with an alabaster jar filled with costly ointment.

This century, I believe, we will witness a turning: women will be placed in power, and God will be pleased.

The Rev. Joan Cooper Burnett '04 M.Div., ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches USA, is Protestant chaplain at Wesleyan University, in Middletown, CT. She is also founder, president, and CEO of G-GIRLS, Inc. a faith-based non-profit corporation formed to foster healthy development and enrich the lives of teen girls and women.

Visions and Revisions: Women in Ministry Today

By Adair T. Lummis

By the early 1970s, for the first time, visible numbers of women were enrolling in seminary M.Div. programs. This historic turn, occurring at the more liberal denominational and ecumenical seminaries, meant not just one or two women in a few courses, but several or more in almost every course, women who could share experiences with one another.

Something new was happening: the ascent of women seemed poised to change old hierarchies in church culture and challenge American society too.

Four decades later, a question persists: has the progress of women in ministry lived up to that early vision?

Political upheaval and dissent in the 1960s – challenges to the war, to racial segregation, to institutions of all sorts – opened up possibilities for cultural changes never considered before. The

The question persists: has the progress of women in ministry lived up to its early vision?

campaign to expand a woman's right to equal opportunity in career path and life choices soon moved to the forefront of these social revolutions. By the 1970s, feminism hit the churches, denominations, and seminaries as no other social movement had in more than a century.

The argument against women's access to ordination was tied to long tradition, theology, liturgy, and denominational canons. Now, though, young women who felt called to the ordained ministry, or thought the call might come during seminary immersion, found far more support from their advisors, seminarians, and faculty than was customarily the case just a few years before.

Yet, as they discovered, a seminary degree did not always lead smoothly to women becoming

ordained, paid, pastoral leaders. Congregational lay leaders often were apprehensive about allowing a clergywoman in their pulpits, since this was uncharted, unfamiliar territory. In the early 1980s, women were often the first female pastors not only in their congregation, but the first at any church across their county or state. To ease the transition, advocates of women's ordination on the regional and national church levels devised strategies for supporting clergywomen, promoting them at least as guest preachers. Grassroots support groups flourished. These helped the way forward for new waves of female clergy. By the mid-1990s, almost every township had at least one congregation with a woman serving as pastor, whether part- or full-time.¹

Public Acceptance

By now, most mainline Protestant churchgoers have likely heard a clergywoman preach. Each year more ordained women become denominational executives, bishops, conference ministers, and district superintendents. At divinity schools, female professors are more prevalent in the classical and practical fields. With growing numbers of clergywomen and wider public acceptance, female seminarians have further increased their numbers in many divinity schools: at least a third, sometimes over half, of the entering M.Div. cohorts today are women.

Nevertheless, women have not achieved parity with men in ordained ministry. Indicators show that in 2010 more than twice as many men as women earned the M.Div. degree.² And if women do earn

the M.Div., they are not as likely as men to seek ordination, possibly because of insufficient support from faculty or regional denominational officials.³ Still, the clergy job market does not fall under the complete control of these ordination gatekeepers. In local churches, pastoral lay committees' choices remain pivotal. But, in many cases, congregational calling committees continue to prefer a youngish married male clergy as their senior pastor or sole pastor.⁴ Though the number of clergywomen has quadrupled in forty years in some denominations and doubled in the last ten years, there has been no similar increase in the proportion of women who are paid full-time as senior or sole pastors:

Though the number of clergywomen has quadrupled in forty years in some denominations, there has been no similar increase in the proportion of women paid as pastors.

the highest-salaried church positions are still going predominately to men.⁵

Why is this happening? Two fundamental trends are contributing to persistent discrepancies in the vocational experiences of clergy women and men.

1) Advocacy declined, and a backlash grew.

Thirty years ago, staffs were funded in mainline church bodies to focus on supporting clergywomen. Today these have greatly diminished or disappeared. Success in doubling and tripling the number of clergy women during these decades led denominational and ecumenical offices to turn reduced revenues and staff to other concerns raised by their constituencies.

Eventually, too, the success in meeting goals for women's ordination fueled more organized resistance among dissenters within denominations. Church leaders who in the late twentieth century increased ordination rates and won acceptance for women clergy now conceded they greatly underestimated the patriarchy still extant. This left them unprepared, as they put it, to deal with "organized attacks from the right."⁶ This resistance, along with mainline financial declines, led to a steady removal of organizational funds from these leaders' control and consequently women's ministry causes.

On the congregational level, even in the first decade of the twenty-first century, lay leaders could still reject an ordained woman as their pastor on the chance she might: A) change their Sunday worship to include more feminist imagery; B) engage

Though the word feminism wasn't coined until the 1890s, a women's movement had already been stirring for sixty years or more in the U.S. and Britain. The modern history of the fight for the rights of women is customarily divided into three waves.

First-wave feminism refers to the activism for women's rights that began in the 1830s and culminated in 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, securing for American women the right to vote. First-wave leaders borrowed ideas and tactics from the abolitionist movement that dominated the nineteenth-century political climate. A first-wave highlight was the Seneca Falls (N.Y.) Convention in 1848. It called for full participation for women in public life, demanding professional and educational opportunities, the right to divorce, the right to own property, and the right to vote. About 100 women (and some men), mostly Quakers, signed the Seneca Falls Declaration. The first wave dispersed after the right to vote was legalized and other social issues (unionization, anti-war activism) moved to the foreground.

The second wave erupted in the 1960s amid the civil rights struggle, rallying around passage of the Equal Rights Amendment as a central goal. Second-wave feminism challenged inequality in the workplace and universities, in sexist language, and in public policy relating to reproductive rights, maternity leave, and domestic violence. Second-wave accomplishments changed American culture — *Roe v Wade*, Title IX, the Violence Against Women Act, women's studies. "The personal is political" became a motto. The second wave stalled by 1980, with the election of Ronald Reagan and the defeat of the ERA. However, the ERA continues to be introduced into Congress each year; advocates hope it will one day prevail, since thirty-five states of the necessary thirty-eight have ratified it.

Third-wave feminism refers to transformations in the movement since the early 1990s, addressing the issues of younger women in a pluralistic, global milieu. The third wave gives more attention to ethnic, class, and sexual-preference differences among women that were often minimized by second-wave political strategies. Some third wave arguments reflect post-structural or postmodern theories of history and gender. Others turn political attention to the threats to women in cultures beyond the West. Third-wave advocacy by writers, bloggers, scholars, and public figures covers a wide range of issues, including date rape, human trafficking, anorexia, pay inequities, rights of same-sex couples to adopt, sexual harassment, immigration problems, genital mutilation, and honor killings.

Increasingly, a feminist fourth wave is under discussion, seeking new emphasis on spirituality and social justice as expressions of women's rights and dignity.

— Ray Waddle

Sources: Sisterhood, Interrupted by Deborah Siegel (Palgrave, 2007); equalrightsamendment.org; utne.com.

in liberal political advocacy promoting social justice causes; or C) appear deficient in the desired leadership skills that are presumably needed for increasing church membership, vitality, and financial health. Paradoxically, there are clergywomen who did demonstrate those very leadership skills in revitalizing their congregation's members and finances, which sometimes aroused even more anxiety and hence were subject to criticism.

2) A presumed consensus among women no longer held.

As the number of ordained women grew and diversified (accenting differences among women around politics, marital status, church position, theology, generational outlook), it became evident that clergywomen hold varied perspectives on theological values, worship styles, and mission priorities even within their own denominations.

By now, clergywomen are not as visibly united in support of denominational channels for women's ordination as was true thirty years ago. Partly because of an absence of such advocacy agencies in the denominations, it has become more difficult to get clergywomen to promote women's church leadership causes. As before, individual clergywomen may see their calling to a particular kind of ministry or congregation instead of aspiring to a senior pastoral position or higher salary elsewhere; or they may have family or other demands that take priority. In a job climate of shrinking full-time paid pastoral positions, combined with the likelihood that seminary students must take on significant tuition debt, there are many women with M.Div. degrees now glad to get any church-funded position that credentials them for ordination and offers an opportunity to be actively engaged in ministry. Just as with male clergy, the competition for clergy jobs can create antagonisms between ordained women within a denomination as well as supportive friendships.

Also evident are divergent sets of values between generations of ordained women. Many Second Wave feminist church leaders who worked together in the '80s and earlier to develop liturgies, support women's ordination, and help women get pastoral positions ruefully acknowledge they often find tepid commitment to these causes among more recently ordained clergywomen. The present generation of female clergy may be less "feminist" in working for these goals, though that does not mean most are uninterested in mission needs or advocacy for social concerns. It is just that mission priorities of Third Wave feminists are often different.

Not long after Second Wave feminism spread into mainline churches and seminaries, women of color indicated their acute dismay regarding white feminists who seemed unaware and uncaring of the particular issues they faced daily. By the '90s, Anglo-churched feminists had a somewhat better understanding and sympathy for Womanist concerns, which focused on equality for women of color and appreciation of their history and culture. Soon, both feminist and Womanist leaders were challenged by lesbian leaders to address their hopes and expectations of inclusion in ministry and leadership. Third Wave feminists ask, in essence, that all women, regardless of race, ethnicity, social class, or sexual orientation be treated equitably in church and society, and many commit themselves to redressing social injustices for women *and* men.

Tenor of the Times

The last four decades have seen the percentages of clergywomen grow exponentially, so that today at least a fifth of active clergy in each of the mainline Protestant denominations are women. In evangelical conservative denominations that permit women's ordination, the number of clergywomen has risen to about 10 percent. These increases represent real growth in lay acceptance and appreciation of the gifts of women as their pastors. As we stated more than a decade ago: "Clergy women are reinventing ministry for the future, refusing the old definitions and expectations. Clergy women are expanding the very essence of Christian ministry and guiding the whole church to rethink and renew its leadership and membership."⁷

Nevertheless, it is hard to see how the tenor of these times lends itself to a revival of the old unity or the old intensity around issues of women in ministry. Global communications bring to widespread notice the wars in the Mideast, the political and religious conflicts in Africa, and the world's horrific continuing struggles against poverty and disease – all issues that preoccupy contemporary churches. National unemployment and debt, the foreclosure crisis, the latest projections of further diminution of social services – all are immediate problems confronting clergy and their flocks.

In light of these factors, no matter how worthy or urgent gender equality continues to be as a social issue, how likely is it that the church's attention will be galvanized to ensure that ordained women have clergy career opportunities comparable to ordained men? Who or what groups will endeavor to make sure ordained women have fair and equal opportunities?

These questions pose a challenge for mainline clergy leadership today, a leadership cadre that includes, thanks to the successes of four decades, clergywomen too.

Adair Lummis, a faculty associate at Hartford Seminary, is a sociologist of religion who has long engaged studies of clergy and ethnic groups in Christianity and other faiths. She has also conducted policy research for various denominations and seminaries. She is co-author of Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling (Westminster John Knox, 1998); Healthy Clergy, Wounded Healers: Their Families and Their Ministries (Church Publishing, 1997); Islamic Values in the United States (Oxford University, 1987); and other books.

Notes

- 1 This estimate is made based on two cross-denominational surveys in 1980-81 and 1993-94 of clergy women and men; J. W. Carroll, B. Hargrove, A. Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for Churches* (Harper and Row, 1983), and B. B. Zikmund, A. Lummis, P. M.Y. Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Westminster John Knox, 1998).
- 2 According to Fall 2010 figures of the Association of Theological Schools, men who were enrolled in M.Div. degree programs in the U.S. outnumbered women 21,765 to 9,331. ATS statistics indicate that 4,253 men completed the M.Div. in the U.S., compared to 2,025 women.
- 3 For case studies of ways in which female seminarians are “cooled out” from considering a pastoral career, see, for instance, B. Finlay, *Facing the Stained Glass Ceiling: Gender in a Protestant Seminary* (University Press of America, 2003). For an evangelical seminary, see M. L. Jensen, M. Sanders, S. Sandage, “Women’s Well-Being in Seminary: A Qualitative Study,” *Theological Education*, 45 (2010), pp. 99-116.
- 4 A. Lummis, *What Do Lay People Want in Pastors? Answers from Lay Search Committee Chairs and Regional Judicatory Leaders* (Duke Divinity Pulpit and Pew Reports, 2003).
- 5 Barna Group, “Number of Female Senior Pastors in Protestant Churches” (2009) <http://www.barna.org/leaderjhip-articles/304>.
- 6 Karen Hessel, *Summary of Major Findings of the 2003 Survey of the NCC Justice for Women Network* http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/women_religion_articles_hessel.html.
- 7 Zikmund, et al, p. 133.



Rahiel Tesfamariam '09 M.Div. was born in Eritrea in 1981 during its long war with Ethiopia. At age 5, while traveling with her mother to visit siblings who had sought political asylum in the U.S., she came to live in New York. Themes of rebellion and liberation have always focused her work as a student, journalist, and community organizer. Through Yale and other venues, her travels – Vietnam, India, Haiti, China, Sudan, Brazil, and elsewhere – have deepened her commitment to ministry and activism. At YDS, she was the first William Sloane Coffin Jr. Scholar for Peace and Justice.

Institutions vs. Movements

I've done grassroots mobilization work and international service work, but I wrestle with the dichotomies between institutions versus movements and individual transformation versus systemic change. It seems that those fighting for justice often choose one or the other, but I'm continuously in search of a hybrid. My current focus is on the intersection of black urban culture, progressive ideology, and Christian faith. Where do those things converge? Where are the tensions and why? How do they shape identity and how might they lead to action? I'm exploring the role that multimedia plays and hope to forge a socio-cultural movement that inspires my generation (and ones to come) to live into those identities in ways that create a transformative ripple effect. I'm in the process of establishing my own institutions to further that work.

Christianity and Culture

Today's American youth are plagued with information saturation; the world comes to their phones with few filters. This comes at a tremendous price – human connectivity. They now turn to Twitter rather than their parents for insight and are more likely to be influenced by reality TV than the Bible. I would like to see Christianity engage this cultural landscape head on, inspiring this generation to apply their faith as a lifestyle rather than as a brand. I so deeply want youth to define their destinies for themselves and to understand and live out what it means to be the beloved of God.

The Birth of Freedom

While undeniable progress has been made, the Christian church is still governed like a male-dominated empire. I worry about what goes unsaid in all those sermons women hear preached by men. What sources of inspiration do women have yet to tap into? While at Yale, I once heard Gloria Steinem speak, and someone asked her how will we know when women have “arrived.” Her answer: when they can birth themselves before they birth children. That statement still grips me. When women learn the importance of giving birth to their own voices and dreams – when those things matter as much as childbirth – then we will know that freedom is near.



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“Of Course He Isn’t Male,” or Who, Me? Sexist?

By David Kelsey

When women began to enroll in greater and greater numbers in Yale Divinity School in the late 1960s and the '70s, the women's movement also arrived, highly articulate and persistent. It had a powerful impact on the school.

Two ingrained traditions that many YDS women protested right off were 1) churches' refusal to ordain women and 2) the overwhelmingly male language conventionally used of God in worship and theology: God as “father,” “lord,” “he,” etc., and for human beings: “man.” Probably because I grew up

In the experience of YDS women, the men did not listen to them, did not hear them, either in class or in informal conversation.

in a clergy family in which it was assumed that the refusal to ordain women was an outrage, I thought, “Well, sure, women ought to be ordained.”

My engagement with the language issue was more complex. My first reaction to it was acute embarrassment that I had never noticed how one-sidedly male conventional usage was. But it was now clear that traditional ways of talking in church were deeply painful to many women. This language was experienced as something that marginalized and in some way demeaned women and privileged men in a community in which there was supposed to be “neither male nor female,” but all on an equal footing before God.

As I saw it, women persuasively argued that this conventional way of talking was just one more piece of evidence that Western culture is sexist. Its arrangements of power reinforced a hierarchy that systematically and unjustly subordinates women to men. I could see it wouldn't do for men to work on changing these conventional ways of talking merely

as a way of being “polite” to women's sensibilities, or being “pastoral” to their hurts, or to refuse to take part in acts of mere “political correctness.” The core issue was injustice. One might be skeptical of the power of changed language usage in church and theology to strike a significant blow to the actual structure of a sexist culture inside and outside the church. It was nonetheless important, I thought, for the church to cast off complicity with that injustice by forsaking language that provides religious justification of that injustice.

So I became a sympathetic male who thought that church and theology needed to work at changing the way we talk about God and humankind.

One day in class in the late '60s someone asked, “Why not use female as well as male images and pronouns when talking about God? Has anyone ever really thought God is male?”

And I heard myself answering, “No! Traditional theology has consistently said God does not have a body. Of course he's not male.”

Classroom Complacency

Everyone in the room was too polite to laugh. But the absurdity of the contradiction between speaking in a sexist way against a sexist understanding of God was blatant. It stung because it was itself sexist. Who, me? Sexist? I was the well-meaning theologian who joins feminist theologians in critiquing sexist use of language in Christian life and thought. It was a consciousness-raising moment. I experienced personally what I had complacently said in class: sexism goes a lot deeper than the way we consciously and explicitly use language. Sexism lies in inarticulate and unconscious feelings, atti-

tudes, and stereotypes that profoundly shape our conscious perceptions and thoughts from childhood on. Deeper than habits of speech, sexism is the many ways in which we are complicit in the injustice of a sexist culture. If we were truly to resist injustice in the form of sexist attitudes, discourse, and power arrangements in church and in our own lives, it would have to involve changes that go much deeper than being more “sensitive” in the way we speak in worship and theology. Resisting sexism is a much longer project than learning how to talk about God without using male pronouns. For me it has been a work ever in process.

YDS women protested a third sexist theme as well, pointedly and repeatedly: in their experience, the men did not listen to them, did not hear them, either in class or in informal conversation. In their perception they were marginalized. That protest helped (pushed?) me further along in the project of learning how to resist the culture’s sexism, and my own, in two ways.

For one thing, it taught me to pay more attention to a dynamic going on in the classroom. My first teaching job was in a men’s college, and I was fascinated by the subtle and not so subtle student power struggles in discussion sections and seminars. They were generated by different personality needs, insecurities, aggressiveness, etc., or they were extensions of social power struggles in other aspects of the college’s life. But they rarely had anything to do with either the topic of the day or the content of the discussion currently underway.

Power Struggle

There were certainly power struggles in my YDS classes, but I also began to see dynamics that, too often, specifically marginalized women in class discussion. For example, a woman would make a comment, silence would follow, then a male student would make another comment that related to the previous one only in the most tangential way. If a male student did directly respond to the woman’s comment, he would tend to address either the male teacher or other male students as though the woman were not present and the men in the room had only overheard her comment in passing. I began to recognize that a male teacher’s responsibility included making sure discussion was brought back to the woman’s ignored comments in a way that directly involved her.

Women’s protest of their marginalization taught me to pay attention to the kinds of issues and questions that were repeatedly pressing for them. Men tended to ask whether, say, the doctrine of God or

of the church or Christology as argued in the text we were discussing was coherent, and how it compared to that of certain other theologians, and why it was persuasive or not. Women were more often likely to ask whether the proposed argument undercut or gave Christian justification to the cultural sexism whose injustice oppressed them. For women, theological discussion was generally issue-oriented liberation theology. Men tended to ask what the theoretical implications are of a theological proposal for issues of social ethics. Women tended to ask what the implications of the proposal are for the attitudes, emotions, passions, and beliefs that foster mutuality and friendship, not only in relation to God but in everyday relationships. Both men and

Men tended to ask what the theoretical implications are of a theological proposal for issues of social ethics. Women tended to ask what the implications of the proposal are for the emotions and beliefs that foster mutuality and friendship.

women were deeply interested in whether theological notions sustained and encouraged their own agency. But there was a difference. Men’s questions and ideas tended to focus on their own individual agency in relation to God, despite a good deal of abstract talk about human beings’ inherent “sociality.” Women’s questions tended to focus on nurturing their own agency in and through their relationships with others.

Changing the Culture

Now of course, not every woman and man in my classroom fit into these generalizations. Another thing I learned from women’s protest of their marginalization in an academic setting is the danger of relying on “false universals,” especially about the “nature” of women and of men. On this point the history of controversy within feminist theology itself about whether there is any such thing as, respectively, *the* “nature” of “women” or “men,” is a salutary caution. Learning to pay attention to these things greatly enlarged the range of topics, issues, and questions that I recognized as properly “theological.”

The women’s movement at YDS also shaped me indirectly by helping to change the school that was the environment of my working life for forty years. It helped change the composition of my set of colleagues by insisting on the urgency of appointing women to what had been an all-male faculty. The

school found the right people. Margaret Farley was appointed in 1971, and Letty Russell in 1974. This started a process of gender change of the faculty that has been as important as it has been slow.

The women's movement also helped change the curriculum. Women students persisted that feminist points of view be represented in every course in the curriculum, and they demanded seminars that focus exclusively on feminist thinkers. The women's movement also changed the environment in which I taught by changing the school's local culture. YDS's ethos had not been much different from the men's college in which I had taught and the one from which I had graduated. Particularly important for women in the 1970s were women's consciousness-raising

I experienced personally what I had complacently said in class: sexism goes a lot deeper than the way we consciously and explicitly use language.

groups led by women for women in the school. Sexism is so pervasive and deep in our culture that, raised and formed by it from childhood as we are, it is as invisible to all of us as the air. The feminist women's groups aimed to raise the consciousness of women for whom the unjust effects of cultural sexism in the society generally and in YDS in particular remained invisible. This led to heightened awareness within the school of the effects of sexism and more intense protest about them.

In retrospect I can see that the YDS women's movement protests against sexist language use in the school and sexist practices of classroom teaching, and the ways in which their presence changed the environment in which I spent much of every day, have helped me further along in learning ways to resist the culture's and the school's sexism, and my own. In a way, this has been a personal process of repentance. I don't suppose I have been terribly successful in moving very far. It's not only a work in progress; if it's going to go very deep, repentance turns out sometimes to be a very slow process.

*David Kelsey '58 B.D. '60 M.A. '64 Ph.D. is Luther Weigle Professor Emeritus of Theology at YDS, where he taught from 1965-2005. His books include *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), *Imagining Redemption* (Westminster John Knox), 2005, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Eerdmans, 1993), and *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Fortress, 1975).*



Jane Ferreira '89 M.A.R. is president and CEO of the Mercy Learning Center in Bridgeport, CT, which offers literacy and life skills to low-income women, serving 500 women annually. Previously she spent twenty-five years as a pastoral minister and educator in various U.S. Roman Catholic dioceses. She also served as an associate chaplain at Yale from 2001-02.

Helping Women in Pain

The women we see have been hurt by poverty, poor housing, a lack of educational choices, domestic abuse, war, and rape. It's incredible working with our students, teaching them to read or to become citizens. Their gratitude is amazing to see. Since 2003, ninety-five women have gotten high school diplomas. Half go on to college; we supply scholarships. The others we help to find a sustainable living wage. We help them become interdependent; they learn to navigate the health care system, the legal, education, and transportation systems. They learn to become better mothers, better women.

Defining "Ministry"

My initial understanding of ministry was in the institutional setting. But after 25 years there, I've gone beyond that. Ministry simply means working with the poor. Whoever is looking out for another is doing ministry.

Assessing Women's Progress

Women run most parishes; they just don't have titles. Women are community-builders. Their creativity and intuition are important. Collaborative ministry is valuable to running a parish; I find that women more than men in congregations are willing to be collaborative. Not that women are easier to work with, but they are willing to collaborate. Sometimes you just want to erase titles and get on with the work. As for the ordination of women, I'd like it to happen. But ordaining women, having them wear a clerical outfit, wouldn't automatically change anything, not if they simply fit into the basic seminary structure and institutional culture. Whether women are ordained or not, there needs to be a sea change, a shift in the church to a base-community approach where leadership comes from the people.

Seeking God

What I would tell a seminarian who is trying to discern her vocation is: know who your God is. Be mindful that your God might be different from the institution's "gods." In daily life I see God in the person who is in front of me. I see God in that marginalized person. And that's a struggle. It's a struggle to see God when you are dealing with people – people who are difficult because they are in terrible pain. Learn to listen. I know I need to listen more – listen to God and listen to people. The institutional church talks a lot to people and at people. I do have questions about the Catholic Church, but I remain a Catholic who has learned much from other spiritualities.



Raising the Dead: Embodied Leadership

By Emilie M. Townes

(Adapted from an address made in Pittsburgh last fall at the Women in Leadership Program's Emerging Leadership Development Institute, sponsored by the Association of Theological Schools)

... invisible things are not necessarily "not there"; that a void may be empty, but it is not a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighborhoods that are defined by the population held away from them. Looking at the scope of American literature, I can't help thinking that the question should have never been "Why am I, an Afro-American, absent from it?" It is not a particularly interesting query anyway. The spectacularly interesting question is, "What intellectual feats had to be performed by the author or his critic to erase me from a society seething with my presence, and what effect has that performance had on the work?" What are the strategies of escape from knowledge? Of willful oblivion? ... Not why. How?¹

— Toni Morrison

We are part of traditions of schooling that are well practiced at silences. This is ironic given how much talking goes on in our classrooms, at professional gatherings, our committee meetings, our writing, and our public speaking. Yet, we have our silences that haunt us like so many methodological loose ends and mangled analyses. These silences include more than race: ethnicity, sexuality, age, class – the list goes on. Some will dismiss this as a familiar, threadbare list of gripes. Latter-day versions of "what do they want?" or "they get all the jobs, don't they?" are far too prevalent in our academic musings in print, in professional societies, at dinner parties and social hours, in the offices of colleagues, and in the halls of our institutions. Somehow, and quite remarkably, a few women in the theological academy

have become, for some, akin to Joel's Biblical horde of locusts – cutting, swarming, hopping, destroying, and entering leadership positions like thieves.²

The persistence of these attitudes should cause all of us in theological education to be careful about how we understand and craft leadership. We must be wary of veering too far into silences that merely contribute to willful oblivion. We must instead take a measured look at what it means to lead with integrity, vision, and courage.

Now, there are many things I have taken with me over the years that echo Morrison's question, "Not why. How?" Perhaps the most important is the imperative that visionary leadership respond to the issues of the day while pushing our understanding of what kinds of institutions, colleagues, staff, and

students we are trying to create and sustain. Doing these things helps to map out leadership strategies for justice-seeking and justice-making, which are, for me, the natural outgrowth of attending to the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality as a woman trying to forge healthy leadership models and then inhabiting them.

I'll focus here on what holds me to this task and my lifelong journey as a minister, scholar, teacher, and now administrator, with Morrison as both guide and prod as I think through this as a relatively new academic dean.

However, long before I came across Morrison's words, I was shaped by strong influences that taught me the importance of truth-telling and the potency of wisdom in faith-filled strategies of leadership. Perhaps the strongest and most profound were the old black folks of my grandmother's generation who helped raise me.

A Cloud of Witnesses

And I can still hear them now ... the older black women of my grandmother's generation – Miss Waddell, Miss Rosie, Ms. Montez, Ms. Hemphill, cousin Willie Mae – as they visited with each other (it was never called gossip) ... in their kitchens, front yards, beauty shops, porches (stoops were a city thing in Southern Pines, NC), Sunday school classes, church socials.

I can still hear them now ... the older black men of my grandmother's generation – Mr. Waddell, Mr. Press, Bad Bill, Mr. Hemphill, Monkey Joe ... as they sat and discussed (it was never called gossip – that was what the women did) ... in the barber shop, under the tree of knowledge outside the barber shop, out in the front yard or side yard tinkering with their cars, after church, during church socials.

Yes, I can still hear them, and you know, the only person I thought was older than these folks was God. And because they were old I was taught they had wisdom, or should have, and they knew things that I thought I could never know because I couldn't believe that I'd ever be as old as they were.

They had something that sustained them in the tightly drawn, color-lined world dividing Southern Pines and West Southern Pines, separated by U.S. Rt 1 and money and power and privilege, separated from the white folks they worked for in their kitchens, yards, driving their cars, buying their groceries, tending to their dogs and horses, and carrying their golf clubs.

They were a white-starched-shirt, best-hat-wearing crew on Sunday morning, and I simply loved being in their presence, sitting quietly and saying nothing so that they would forget I was there (or

did they?). They turned to the joy they found in the Lord and to the strength they found at the altar to put their children through college and love all the children in that small community because that's what grown folks are supposed to do.

And in that love they taught us more than our ABCs and times tables. They taught us what it meant to be wise by their actions and not just their words.

As a woman in theological education, I refuse models of leadership that inspire fear or shame or sycophancy.

Evil is as evil does, they told us, and stay out of corners, and keep your legs together, and a hawk always circles his prey.

Yes, I still see them: proud black people who knew when to bend and not break ... going to their jobs ... making a way out of no way ... succeeding ... failing ... And the wisdom and giving of it never left them, because they believed with every ounce of their being that they had to pass good things on to the next generation. And the one thing they had that no amount of the KKK, paddy rollers, or sheriff departments could take away – even with fire hoses and lynching trees – was what they knew about life and how to survive it and even thrive. They had what ethicist Peter Paris calls practical wisdom.

Keeping Time, Keeping Faith

So these exemplars of practical wisdom help me keep the time beat. Such exemplars teach all of us about where we've come from, so that we are not tempted to make decisions in thin air but instead lean into the thick isness of our lives – the agonies and the ecstasies – to find our bearings for the journey. This wisdom, this way of truth-telling, is not showy, but it is steady. It brings the past into the present and the present into the future, so that we remember we are a people in time and of time, and nothing we do puts us outside of time – because we can never get away from the history that brought us here, even if we do not know it. And it is dangerous to be in a position where we cannot remember what we never knew, and then repeat well-worn atrocities and failed strategies instead of building on the past even while refusing to succumb to appeals to the past that keep us from stretching into a tangibly better future.

I use Toni Morrison's question, "Not why. How?" as a starting point to think about the challenges at the intersection of race and gender, class, and sexuality that women in leadership in theological education face – and to devise strategies for managing

ing these challenges. Morrison's question provides us a methodological frame for defying the willful, harmful oblivion of ornate silence and absence in a "seething" society. And those old black folk of my grandmother's generation provide the heart and beat of the strategies we need to address the void.

This is crucial for me because black bodies are a seething presence in U.S. society. We are found in the American literary canon – Stowe, Hemingway, Cather, Poe, Twain, and others. We are found on television and other media forms as thieves, murderers, dangerous, foreboding, violent, pathologized, fetishized, demonized. We are the hyper-sexualized other: folk build legends around our imaged sexual prowess – lascivious hips, alluring breasts, big and bigger penises – because we are a hot, black hot people, and we are only looking for the next lay, the next conquest, the next victim.

We disrupt these images from time to time with those who are deemed exceptional or special or presidential. This disruption cheers some and

Any institution that feels that the questioning, dancing mind is a threat to God is likely a wasteland that consecrates timidity as love, blindness as faithfulness.

threatens others. We are a society in chaos about many things, and black bodies are only one element of this chaos. But we are an illustration of the othering – the demonizing, the objectifying – that goes on in the U.S., whether it be class, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, geographic origin, age, and on and on.

Body Shame

In my work and career, I try to face the fact that religious bodies are too often of little help in calling us to account on this. They and those of us who participate in them are far too quiet in our dissent against racial or gender prejudice, preferring, oftentimes, to create enclaves of holiness to survive the blight and wait for a time that is ripe for change, reformation, transformation. Far too often, our theologies fail us and we fail them. We create a bad infinity of stereotypes and rationalizations about others – and ourselves. We are terrified of our bodies, so we try to control them in often misshapened ways. We put too much into them or we starve them. We abuse them with overwork, or with controlled and uncontrolled substances. We blind our terror with dyspeptic bouts of conservatism, liberalism, progressivism.

On my more cynical days, it feels like I and others are rearranging the deck chairs on our pedagogical

and theological Titanics as we deal with incredibly complex human bodies in a cultural climate fueled often by heterosexism, empire, racism, imperialism, and homophobia. However, my response is to refuse to accept, in my life and work, a not-so-moral stance that asks of us – tells us, demands of us – that we view our bodies and spirits as separate, antagonistic, and unequal as the condition for living out traditional or corporate models of leadership rather than embracing a Biblical witness blended with faithful discipleship for our day and time.

An Everyday Refusal

I try to live out my everyday refusal to confine my own complex body in "acceptable" but basically demonic stereotypes of what and who is a black lesbian, raised in the South from a normal dysfunctional family that was middle-class and highly educated, who attended the Protestant church on the regular until it became irrelevant for a teenager who had large questions about the nature of the universe, who was coming to understand her sexuality and sexual identity, race, and gender, who played sports, played in the band, went to school in the Midwest, who has by now lost both her parents, loves her baby sister dearly, and works in an Ivy League institution – much to my surprise – and tries not to forget all those influences and people who brought me to this time and place through their love and their anger at a society that marked my black female lesbian body as disposable unless I'm working 16-hour days and neglecting rest and renewal, as if that neglect is normal and essential to good leadership and sound administrative principles.

Hence, as a woman in theological education, I refuse models of leadership that inspire fear or shame or sycophancy. I refuse to perform a post-modern minstrel act as if this were what leadership should be about. We should not be promoting a comic skit of learning or buffoonish ideas that obscure the beating heart of deep engagement with our institutions and the people that give them life and breath. We should not be promoting research, teaching, advising, writing, or administration in black-face caricatures that bear little resemblance to the thoughtful or wise reflection that leadership with integrity, vision, and courage encourage. Many of us in theological education have been told to live in split, if not fractured bodies, to deny the gift that God gives us body and soul, to ignore the warning signs of stress, to push through exhaustion. And sometimes you and I have been told this is holy.

Leadership should not be about tearing body and soul to shreds or inviting colleagues and students to

perform this demonic shake dance with us. I try to avoid participating in bouts of leadership that place the folks I work with or myself on a postmodern auction block of expediency, expendability, and relentless bottom lines. We cannot be about the work of raising the dead if it means adopting leadership styles that endorse overwork with little time to think through the long-term consequences of a decision made in a pressing now.

Breathing Spaces

Instead, I am looking for breathing spaces, faithfully, to understand that leadership in theological education should be about building communities of learning and discipleship. I try to maintain a sense of integrity and accountability by connecting with the foundations of my life and work, viewing leadership through windows of individual and communal memory. This helps me challenge my own assumptions and values when they are placed on a wider playing field with the assumptions and values of others. I want to make better and healthier use of my time rather than spending time craving, hoarding, amassing, or tackling budget cuts or problematic student performance with a rote and rigid clipboard, or using my office and my life in the quest to prove I'm right and the only one with a good idea. Turning to a framework of integrity – visionary yet pragmatic – helps me out of the hegemonic endgame of lifeless administrative models, which appear to treat people more like bottom lines than God's gift of creation.

Our challenge is to seek to build and sustain institutions that bring mind, body, and spirit into educational spaces that train people for a wide variety of ministries – “embodied vision” in institutional settings that often fear embodiment. This demands courage to acknowledge that our bodies carry our past, our present, our future. I have to think through how I craft integrity and vision in institutions that are often terrified of ... the curve of our hips, the arch of our backs, the slow swing in our walks, the glide of our fingers, the fire in our eyes, the coil of our hair, the deep moans and shouts of our ecstasies, the bottomless welling cries of our sorrows, the slow bend of our smiles, the precision of our minds, the sass of our talk. Morrison's question, “Not why. How?” helps me stay honest to this challenge.

I will always argue for rigor in deep-walking visioning. But what I stand against is the kind of disinterested, “objective” visioning that doesn't factor or reckon that our work is going to have a profound impact on someone's actual life. For most of us, I suspect, our training did not teach us how to be

scholar *and* teacher *and* administrator *and* whole person in the schools where we work. We should do our work with passion and precision – and realize we are not random bits of disembodied information drifting or running through space ungrounded in history and interpersonal relationships. Such assumptions lead to a leadership style that is so terrified of the complexity of institutions and the people who inhabit them that it shapes answers before hearing the questions, crafts admissions policies that look like the high side of misery, sanctions curricula that seek to segregate the mind, body, and spirit, and rolls over and plays dead when faced with budget constraints.

Don't Be Too ... Female

Embodied vision refuses to accept this cartel of dehumanization. Embodied vision challenges us and our institutions to think boldly, recognizing our humanness, recognizing the promises found in each of us, holding our selves together, holding the body and the spirit together – and whirling, whirling, whirling with a God who delights in all of who we are and who we are yet to become as individuals and as institutions. Any institution that feels that the questioning, the dancing mind is a threat to God is likely a wasteland that consecrates

Our leadership models often forget God's laughing side, and this makes too much of what we do humorless and inept.

timidity as love, blindness as faithfulness. It is likely to demand: don't be too queer, too out, too black, too Latina, too native or indigenous, too Asian, too female, too male, too bisexual, too transgender, too anything but straight and white and usually male as an administrator because failing to do so is practicing essentialism or identity politics.

No, embodied vision begins with the concreteness of our humanity rather than esoteric concepts abstracted from life that lure us into believing it is better to live in an unrelenting ontological suicide watch than in celebration of the richness and responsibilities of what it means to be created in the image of God and to help shape institutions that are witnesses to this.

The practice of leadership with integrity, vision, and courage learns from many sources and not solely from the echoes of our minds and intellects, or from our various social locations or disciplinary expertise, or from our gender roles or theological

viewpoints. The epistemology of knowledge is always contextual, always fraught with our best and worst impulses. It is never objective, never disinterested, no matter how many rational proofs we produce to argue to the contrary. Leadership should

We are terrified of our bodies, so we try to control them in often misshapened ways. We put too much into them or we starve them. We abuse them with over-work, or with controlled substances.

recognize the utter humanity of this and embrace it and not obfuscate it. There's a big world out there for our institutions to craft learning paradigms so that our students can deepen their abilities to see it, experience it, know it, and change it.

For women standing at the intersection of gender and race (and more), the challenge is to integrate integrity, vision, and courage into leadership so that objectivity is not the sole marker of administrative brilliance. These do not displace objectivity but become part of our methodological toolkit, because our leadership models often forget God's laughing side, and this makes too much of what we do humorless and inept. We forget that a serious *and* capricious God has a hand in creation. Recognizing these things, we can do relevant scholarship, excellent teaching, ministry, learning, *and* administration.

An Ultimate Womanist Move

Negotiating all this can be a tall order. Working our way through vocational challenges, we may choose, unwisely, to suffer through on our own and in silence. One place to begin unpacking this is in our approaches, right now, to our various academic programs:

- Consider integrating theory and practice in order to find a model that doesn't create another rigid hierarchy of disciplines but a synthesis that provides relevant and rigorous education for our students.
- Recognize that the job of a good registrar has always had an element of pastoral care, and this shouldn't be neglected despite the ever-increasing demands to provide statistics, track students, and make sure that folks graduate.
- Ensure that the business office functions to keep good accounting of our institutions but also sees its work as ministry and encourages faculty to become comfortable with the world of numbers and good record-keeping practices.

A strategic framework of integrity, vision, and courage, embraced with passion, takes seriously

that we are called to work with each other and with God to craft a new heaven and a new earth. It means developing leadership skills that help mitigate bravura spells of ignorance and arrogance. It means setting aside impulses to control or dominate and allowing the richness of insights and experiences beyond our own to deepen our leadership and beget more piercing analysis, more trenchant critiques, more relevance.

I love what I do. It is nothing but sheer and utter joy to walk into the classroom and see what we will learn. I love:

- having the time and space to form a sustained thought and maintain it long enough to recognize its strengths and weaknesses.
- working with faculty colleagues on joint projects or offering a listening ear or guiding voice to them as they work through a tough classroom situation or research idea or how to get published or how to survive.
- working with administrators and staff to create structures where students and staff can do their best work and be challenged and find some measure of nurture.
- spending time with younger scholars and future administrators and thanking God Almighty that the next generation is coming and I should get ready to retire and let others step to the fore.

Because regardless of how tough it gets some days, I am encouraged to live my work with joy and passion and to remind myself that I want to be *very* old when I die – because dying of old age is the ultimate Womanist move of effective and faithful leadership in theological education.

Emilie M. Townes is YDS Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology. Her teaching and research interests include Christian ethics, Womanist ethics, critical social theory, and postmodernism. Her books include Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil (Palgrave, 2006), Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health and a Womanist Ethic of Care (Wipf & Stock, 2006), and In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness (Abingdon, 1995). She served as president of the American Academy of Religion in 2008 and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is also ordained in the American Baptist Churches USA.

Notes

- 1 Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" in *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (1) Winter 1989, pp. 11-12.
- 2 See Joel 1-2, especially 1:4 and 2:3-10 (New Revised Standard Version).



Woman Carrying Basket
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The Bible in Transit

By Phyllis Trible

Recently I have been pondering anew the Book of Ruth – or rather feminist interpretations of it. So numerous and diverse have they become that I begin to wonder about the hermeneutical enterprise, especially its place in the church. Accompanying me on these wonderings is not, however, Ruth (to it we shall return) but instead two questions from the story of Hagar.

Treated harshly by her Hebrew mistress Sarai, the Egyptian slave Hagar fled to a wilderness nourished by a spring of water (Gen 16). There a messenger of God asked her, “Where have you come from? And where are you going?” Hagar answered the first question, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai,” but never addressed the second. Speaking about the present, she named the past and left open the future. (In time, the unfolding of her story disclosed that terrifying answer.)

Across Decades

Mutatis mutandis, these two questions fit my wonderings about feminist interpretation of the Bible. Indeed, “Where have we come from? And where are we going?” The first question is not difficult to answer. We are fleeing the land of patriarchal (male-dominated) hermeneutics to find oases of nourishment in the wilderness. In the United States, this answer began to emerge in the late 1960s, when the second wave of feminism moved into the field of religion. Mary Daly at Boston College led the way.¹ By the 1970s the movement turned attention to the Bible. Though Daly denounced it *in toto*, other voices spoke differently. Letty M. Russell of Yale Divinity School edited a small book whose title, *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* (1976), made clear that not all feminists reject the Bible and, further, that men do not control interpretations of it.² Some thirty-five years later, we continue to answer the question, “Where have we come from?”

Across decades this “we” has expanded to embrace diverse voices within church, synagogue, and society at large. Race, class, sex, ethnicity, age, gender orientation, cultural, social, economic, and historical situations, plus individual experiences – all these and other variables shape and reshape

These two questions fit my wonderings about feminist interpretation of the Bible ... “Where have we come from? And where are we going?”

interpretations. In addition, varieties of disciplines – historical criticism, archaeology, sociology, literary analyses, linguistics, psychology, the new historicism – complicate the mix. Descriptions of where we are and forecasts of where we might go are far from simple.

The Benign Book of Ruth

To pursue the matter, let us return to the seemingly benign Book of Ruth. In 1978, I, a white Protestant woman in the United States., read it as a story of redemption.³ The Judahite mother-in-law Naomi and her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth, both widows, worked out their own salvation with fear and trembling, with audacity and strength, in a world that had little place for them. Early on, Orpah, the other widowed Moabite daughter-in-law, obeyed Naomi and returned to her own “mother’s house.” Without censure, she departed the story. Then, in

an ironic twist, Ruth disobeyed Naomi and returned with her to Judah. Each of the three women made her own decision. As the story continued, Naomi and Ruth surmounted barriers of age, ethnicity, culture, custom, and familial patterns. They showed even God a more excellent way than famine, exile, and death. Reflecting on Ruth now, I find the story as redemptive as first I found it. From where I have come, there I am going.

Ten years after this reading (1988), the African-American Christian professor Renita J. Weems wrote about Ruth under the general rubric of “a Womanist vision.”⁴ The hymnic title of her essay sounded its stance: “Blessed Be the Tie That Binds.” For Weems, the story promotes friendship – “female bonding” between Naomi and Ruth. As for Orpah, her decision to return home is “common sense.” It does not destroy “the love bond between the two women.” With a pastoral bent, Weems averred that Naomi and Ruth “eventually found the healing power of God in each other’s love and forbearance.”

Six years later (1994), the Jewish author Cynthia Ozick described Naomi, after the death of her husband Elimelech, as transformed from a character of “compliance” to “a woman of valor,” with “a program of autonomy.”⁵ She described Orpah as a model of normality, in no way to be overlooked or censured. As Orpah left the story, the singularity of Ruth emerged. This woman possessed insight “vaster than the merely familial.” Overall, Ozick deemed Ruth a book “wherein goodness grows out of goodness, and the extraordinary is found here, and here, and here” – a book, she said, where “mercy and redemption unfold.”

Similarly, the Jewish scholar Tikva Frymer-Kensky, writing in 2002, extolled “this charming narrative” of friendship between Naomi and Ruth.⁶ Though never referring to Orpah, she claimed that “all the characters are noteworthy for their mindfulness of God’s blessing and for their willingness to demonstrate *hesed*, ‘loving-kindness,’ by acting benevolently toward one another beyond the expectations of legal and even moral obligations.”

Diversity Within

Spanning decades, these positive readings of Ruth challenge patriarchy in church and synagogue. Yet the positive may not prevail. The collection of essays to which Ozick contributed, for example, offers a host of divergent ideas, all proposed by Jewish women living in the United States or Israel. Some of them view Naomi as a cipher for male values that find fulfillment for women in marriage and

children. Others see Naomi as a childless widow who does not remarry and thereby achieves a status independent of husband and children. Some find her an overbearing, interfering, and domineering mother-in-law; others, a caring, concerned, altruistic mother-in-law. For some, Naomi is an embittered old woman who, at first, denounces God for her troubles and, at last, fails even to thank God when she has recovered. For others, she is a figure of faith who experiences God as enemy but perseveres to seek blessing in adversity.

From diverse Jewish perspectives in the United States and Israel, we move to diverse Christian perspectives in Asian countries. There also, positive slants contend with negative. While lecturing in the Philippines, Kathy Doob Sakenfeld of Princeton Theological Seminary learned of the encouragement that the Book of Ruth brings to women struggling

I do not find mainline churches grappling with Biblical hermeneutics. Instead, I find scripture cited as illustration, a jumping off place. For churches to slight the Bible, in whatever way, leaves us without a shared narrative.

for their daily bread – for sheer economic survival.⁷ But she also heard about a young woman from a destitute family who (naively) agreed to work as a “dancer” in a wealthy foreign country. When questioned about the decision, she compared her situation to Ruth’s offering of herself to Boaz, and God “making everything turn out right.”

Several years ago, Korean students at Union Theological Seminary told me that certain churches in their homeland use Ruth to compel young brides to serve their mothers-in-law rather than form independent families and seek their own employment. In marriage ceremonies, the bride is expected (required?) to pledge allegiance to her mother-in-law by quoting to her (not to the groom, as sometimes regrettably happens in Western ceremonies) Ruth’s words of devotion to Naomi (1:16-17). Thereby, traditional values are upheld as Christian values. In this setting, Korean feminists find no healing power in Ruth’s story. To the contrary, it is used against them.

Post-colonial voices sound strikingly different notes. Cornell University English professor Laura E. Donaldson, of Cherokee descent, criticizes Ruth for promoting “the use of intermarriage as an assimilationist strategy.”⁸ The decision by Moabite Ruth to adopt the country, people, and God of her Judahite

mother-in-law would, if emulated, erase the identity of indigenous peoples. Sadly, that erasure often happened in the treatment of Native Americans by white invaders of European ancestry. Rejecting the view of Ruth as a model for tolerance, bravery, and diversity, a post-colonialist reader may well see her as a betrayer, collaborating with the enemy.

Yet within the story Donaldson finds a counter-narrative. It belongs to Orpah, the daughter-in-law who departed early, leaving Naomi and returning to her “mother’s house” (1:14). That reference echoes Cherokee society, which is historically matrilineal. By remaining faithful to her traditions and her ancestors, Orpah becomes for Donaldson “the story’s central character.” Her decision, not Ruth’s, is the paradigm to emulate. This postmodern reading turns the story against itself. This post-colonialist perspective would transform “Ruth’s positive value into a negative and Orpah’s negative value into a positive.”

A Confusion of Tongues

Redemptive, destructive, ambiguous: judgments about the Book of Ruth range from the benign to the fractious. Some of them stay close to the text; some select from it; some stray from it. Far from unique, what happens with this one book extends to readings of countless Biblical texts, as feminists flee the land of patriarchy to confront the terrors, blessings, and uncertainties of scripture in the wilderness.

From where we have come, we know. But where are we going? Confronting that question, I call upon another Biblical story: the Tower of Babel (Gen 11). At the beginning, the people of the earth spoke with one language and the same words. At the end, they spoke in confused tongues, not understanding one another, as God scattered them over the face of the earth. Contemporary interpretation reflects this story.

But what does the reflection mean? Is the Babel story, in our context, a judgment against the hubris of hermeneutical singularity – only one valid interpretation – or is it a judgment for multiple and diverse voices as an antidote to hubris? If the latter, how do we transform the confusion of tongues – anything goes – into benefits of multiculturalism? Is the church up to the challenge posed by a malleable text in changing contexts?

For me, doubts abound. With a few exceptions, so-called mainline churches are shrinking in strength and substance. Moreover, I do not find them grappling with Biblical hermeneutics. Instead, I find scripture cited as illustration and jumping off place – sometimes invoked as traditionally un-

derstood and other times ignored. For churches to slight the Bible, in whatever way, leaves us without a shared narrative from which faith, ethics, and action can spring. Where there is no narrative, the church stumbles into boredom and irrelevance.

Borrowing questions asked of Hagar and using the Book of Ruth, we have engaged feminist Biblical interpretation. Not unlike Hagar’s answer, ours has named the past, spoken about the present, and left open the future. Now as we continue our struggles in the wilderness of confused tongues, we wait, watch, and wonder – for we know, from where we have come, that the story goes on.

Phyllis Trible, Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature Emerita at Union Theological Seminary in New York, is an internationally known scholar and a pioneer in the study of women and gender in Biblical interpretation. Her books include God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Fortress, 1986) and Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Feminist Narrative (Fortress, 1984), and Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah (Augsburg, 1994) She was also editor, with Letty Russell, of Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives (Westminster John Knox, 2006).

Notes

- 1 Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Harper Colophon Books, 1968, 1975).
- 2 Letty M. Russell, ed., *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* (Westminster Press, 1976).
- 3 Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Fortress Press, 1978), pp.166-99.
- 4 Renita J. Weems, *Just A Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible* (LuraMedia, 1988), pp. 22-36.
- 5 Cynthia Ozick in Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer, eds., *Reading Ruth* (Ballantine Books, 1994), pp. 211-232. See *passim* for my subsequent references to this collection of essays.
- 6 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (Schocken Books, 2002), pp. 238-256.
- 7 Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives?* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) 27-48; cf. *Ruth: Interpretation* (John Knox Press, 1999), esp. pp. 30-35.
- 8 Laura E. Donaldson in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 159-70; cf. Roy Sano, “The Bible and Pacific Basin Peoples,” *The Theologies of Asian-Americans and Pacific Peoples: A Reader* (Asian Center for Theology and Strategies, Pacific School of Religion, 1976), pp. 296-309.

A CELLULAR HISTORY OF PAIN

By Jan Jorgensen

*"For just as through the disobedience of the one the many were made sinners,
so also through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous." Romans 5:19*

I.

Say, for instance, contemplating sin, St. Augustine was on to something ...

Say that Judah's brotherly betrayal altered his genetic code;
that his sons inherited, absorbed the backhand blow ...

Say Tamar, having little choice, was cheated repeatedly before her unorthodox undertaking ...
Judah was quick to condemn her until he saw the tokens of his guilt.

(Perhaps his thoughts echoed the scribes' unrecorded question:
How does one deal with a cunning woman?)

How long must a woman bear a man's sin within her body? I ask,
knowing it can be decades.

II.

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any creature"
more subtle, perhaps, save one: "she beguiled me ..."

Resentfully, then, they named womanly pain a curse.

But in our bodies we share The Eternal's primal contractions:
we are one with the Love that birthed Creation.

III.

Say we have chosen caricature over portraiture; we might still recall Judah's heroic moments

but the woman flung to the street, the woman at the well, the woman who anointed Jesus,
are known simply by the violence of one word,

sinner. It is an obscure descriptive. There are countless ways to transgress,
yet note the assumptions made when speaking of women ...

Are they called sinners because it is *tiflut* to teach women Torah
and interpreters, reading "*tiflut*" see *licentious*, ignore *frivolous*?

Sinner violates each woman's vulnerabilities of trust and love,
while centuries of deeds have followed closely upon one thought ...

Do you see with careful editing how easy it is to misconstrue?

IV.

It is nearly effortless to transmit a legacy of wounding and shame.
Each destructive word is infused with a cellular history of pain,
each loveless phrase covers your brain with a tattoo of suffering ...

V.

Bury your wounded mind in your heart;
be one with the Love that birthed Creation.

Talking Back to Jesus

By Mary R. D'Angelo

"I want to prepare women and girls to speak truth to power like so many Biblical women did."

These words from Debbie McLeod Sears' article in the Fall 2010 *Reflections* immediately evoke heroic images of women in the Hebrew Bible: Deborah's triumphant song, Miriam leading the victory dance of the Israelite women, Hannah telling Eli that she was not drunk, but praying.

Bold images of women speaking truth to power from the New Testament are fewer. The great hymnic prophecies of Mary and Elizabeth in Luke announce a radical revision of power, but they are spoken to each other and to the reader. The woman who comes closest to speaking truth to power in the New Testament is the Greek, Syro-Phoenician woman who talks back to Jesus in Mark 7:24-30. In some

inspired Sears' hope and hearing them into speech has been the product of the long and ongoing labor of feminist interpretation.

This interpretive enterprise was driven in good measure by the struggles to get women ordained in the majority of churches that prohibited or avoided the ordination of women, to expand the opportunities of women to minister whether or not they were ordained, to reorient ministry to acknowledge and combat the realities of rape, domestic violence, and social subordination, and to create inclusive worship. Addressing these issues required finding the texts that could speak to women's needs and developing the questions that would unlock their silences.

The baptismal proclamation that in Christ "there is no Jew nor Greek, there is no slave nor free, there is no 'male and female' " (Gal 3:28), was the first platform in the case for women's ordination and equality. But the application of its spectacularly radical interpretation of Gen 1:27b was contested. Krister Stendahl provided a way past the conflict when, in 1958, he made the case for ordaining women in Sweden's Lutheran Church. This text was central to his argument, but Stendahl positioned the problem as one of hermeneutics, arguing for the potential, the future of the text. Paul intended, indeed demanded, the full implementation of "no Jew and Greek" in his communities. The other two pairs should be understood to have the same potential for implementation.¹

Stendahl's highly influential reading was a turn toward the future of the text: Paul never envisioned abolition or the civil rights movement, nor did he foresee women's liberation or the ordination of women (or for that matter, of men). But the procla-

In the succeeding forty years, feminist interpretation has transformed the population of the New Testament as radically as the population of YDS has changed.

ways, that example seems appropriate. For women in the churches, speaking truth to power has often meant talking back to our own – our communities, our churches, our families.

Unlocking the Silences

When I took up residence in the YDS library to work on a doctorate in New Testament in 1969-70, there were no women faculty in either the Divinity School or the Religious Studies Department, very few women students, and no feminist interpretation to study. In the succeeding forty years, feminist interpretation has transformed the population of the New Testament as radically as the population of YDS has changed. Uncovering more of the women who

mation lives to celebrate the hope of radical human equality. As Letty Russell suggested, it is a vehicle for “God’s intention to mend creation,” a “memory of the future.”²

The Search Begins

The search for a “useable past” was the inspiration for the enterprise of women’s history, a history that could support emancipation. Reading the New Testament in search of “real women” has transformed one of the all-time great contestants for least-read passage in the Bible: Romans 16, which consists largely of greetings from Paul to people otherwise unknown. One catalyst of this transformation was Bernadette Brooten’s article that uncovered a woman apostle under an entirely fictive masculine name in Rom 16:7. Her article was published in *Women Priests* (1977), a collection that sought to refute point by point the arguments excluding women from ordination in the 1976 Vatican Declaration.³ On the basis of her work, “Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen,” who were “men of note among the apostles” according to the RSV, in the NRSV became “Andronicus and Junia, my relatives” who were “prominent among the apostles.” As Paul’s kin, Junia must have been a Jew; she was clearly a speaker of Greek. Her Roman name reveals her past (or her heritage) in slavery; it may also identify her as a Roman citizen.

Illumined by the figure of “Junia the first woman apostle,” Christian origins in Rome look very different; the labor of Mary (16:6), Tryphaena and Tryphosa (16:12) and Persis (16:12), as well as Prisca (3-5) becomes visible as missionary work.⁴ Other research and more accurate translation turned Phoebe, a “deaconess” and “helper” in the RSV, into a “deacon” and “benefactor” in the NRSV (16:1-2). The less specific word “minister” would be a better translation than deacon (cf. 2 Cor 3:6, where Paul applies this word to himself) and the more specific word “patron” could replace benefactor. The commendation Paul gives Phoebe is undoubtedly a two-way street; she is likely to have been the letter-carrier, and in that role to have been able to interpret the letter, and in particular to be specific about what help Paul wants from the Roman communities, if he is to “somehow at last succeed in coming to” them (1:10).⁵

Paul Among the Women

These rereadings make it possible to listen to women’s silences in new ways. Did the women of Romans 16 understand the baptismal proclamation “no ‘male and female’ ” as a warrant for their ministries? As an invitation or even a commitment

to sexual abstinence? Or, according to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s suggestion, as the abolition of patriarchal marriage?⁶ Did Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom 16:12) live out the proclamation “no male and female” in their partnership? What of Urbanus and Stachys (16:9), and Paul and his multiple male missionary partners?⁷ How do the households (largely of slaves; 16:10, 11) and the quasi-familial groups (16:13, 14, 15) understand their own relationships in the mission? Set amid these women (and men), Paul looks different; he emerges as an apostle who had to work within a web of missionary relationships that included financial and spiritual indebtedness to women leaders, including at least one woman apostle “who was in Christ before” him (16:7).

As women’s history has revised the population and shape of the early Christian mission, intensive feminist rereading has recast the gospel narratives, drawing attention, for instance, to the startlingly assertive women in the Gospel of John (the mother of Jesus, John 2:1-12; the Samaritan woman, 4:1-42; Martha the sister of Mary, 11:1-12:8; Mary Magdalene, 20:1-18). One wrong turn taken by some approaches to the Gospels was the claim that a “feminist” Jesus rescued women from a Judaism constructed as relentlessly repressive and misogynist – in the words of Judith Plaskow, “blaming patriarchy on the Jews.”⁸ Despite John’s overt hostility to “the Jews,” Adele Reinhartz’s work on the Gospel has shown that it is in the dialogues with these women that Jesus is most clearly identified as a Jew.⁹

Encounter at the Well

A close, critical reading of the rhetoric of John 4:1-42 transforms the Samaritan woman at the well. Once an exemplar of obtuse misunderstanding and of sexual sin, she emerges in a careful reading as the most persistent and astute of all Jesus’s interlocutors in this Gospel. In contrast to Nicodemus (3:1) she comes to Jesus in the brightest light of day (4:6-7). When he accosts her asking for water, she points out to him (and the reader) his transgression of propriety (4:9). To his oblique cue “if you knew who speaks to you” (10) she poses the right question: “Are you greater than our (common) father Jacob ... ?” (12) When he offers the living water of Spirit and Wisdom (13-14), she makes the perfect response: “give me always this water” (15) – and having received it, leaves her water jar behind (28). When he asks for her husband, she hears “everything (she’s) ever done” (29, 39). But she does not hear an accusation of sexual sin: she does not repent, and Jesus sees no need to forgive her. Because he knows her, she knows him: he is a prophet (19; prophet is by no

means a lesser title in John). Thus she asks him the theological question that has separated his people and hers (20). So pleased is she with his response (21-24) that she wrests from him the confession of his messiahship (25-26), then goes on to become a source of life to her own city (27-30, 39-42).¹⁰

In counterpoint to my retrieval of the Samaritan woman, Musa Dube's decolonizing reading addresses the missionary character of John 4:1-42. The universalizing claim that Jesus is the "savior of the world" (4:42) takes on an imperialist character, especially in light of the quite startling cultural chauvinism he expresses in 4:22. In response, Dube offers a decolonized rewriting of the story by Mositi Torontle, a Botswanan woman novelist: in it Jesus is replaced by a prophetess, Mother Mary Magdalene, who affirms rather than denigrates the national identity of the woman, now named Mmapula, and announces healing for her people. She also explains why Mmapula has no husband: her husband belongs to the mines.¹¹

Reading Amid Poverty

This decolonizing reading is a reminder that feminist interpretation is a task of the utmost urgency for the churches attempting to read scripture in our world. Women make up two-thirds of the billions of poor and very poor people, and the use of sex and gender prescriptions to circumscribe their lives has made that so. Putting women's lives and experiences at the center of Biblical interpretation is essential if the churches are to avoid reinforcing the power relations that enforce poverty and hunger, promote disease, and have propagated AIDS. If the churches wish to empower the humiliated to rise up and the hungry to be filled with good things, they must read the scriptures in ways that enable the women of the world to sing out the Magnificat as a "memory of the future."

Feminist interpreters continue to struggle, talking back to the texts, to the churches, and to ourselves. We attempt to be what Adele Reinhartz has called the engaged reader, seeking to befriend these ancient, beloved, and dangerous texts by probing directly "some of our (the texts' and the readers') deepest convictions and our (the texts' and the readers') most profound differences."¹²

Mary R. D'Angelo '76 Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Theology at Notre Dame. Her research areas include the origins of Christianity, Judaism in Roman antiquity, and Greek and Roman religion, with special interest in women and gender in ancient religion.

Notes

- 1 Stendahl's essay was translated by Emilie T. Sander, who would later become the first woman to teach New Testament full-time at YDS. It was published as *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics* (Facets 15; Fortress, 1966).
- 2 This principle already appeared in *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective* (Westminster, 1974), pp. 72-103, but appeared consistently in all her work; see also *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Fortress, 1987).
- 3 Bernadette J. Brooten, "'Junia....Outstanding Among the Apostles' (Romans 16.7)," *Women Priests, A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, edited by Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler (Paulist, 1977), pp. 141-44.
- 4 Eldon J. Epp, *Junia, the First Woman Apostle* (Fortress, 2005). It is of course not really possible to know who was the first woman apostle.
- 5 Jouette Bassler, "Phoebe," *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament*; ed. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven and Ross Kraemer (Houghton Mifflin, 2000), pp.134-36.
- 6 *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (Crossroad, 1983), p. 211.
- 7 See D'Angelo, "Women Partners in the New Testament," *JFSR* 6 (1990), pp. 65-86; republished in *Que(e)rying Religion* edited by Gary Comstock and Susan Henking (Continuum, 1996), pp. 441-55.
- 8 "Christian Feminism and Anti-Semitism," *CrossCurrents* 28 (1978), pp. 306-309.
- 9 Reinhartz, "From Narrative to History: The Resurrection of Martha and Mary, in 'Women Like This': New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World, edited by Amy-Jill Levine (Early Jewish Literature 1; Scholars Press, 1991), pp.174-76.
- 10 On John 4:1-42, see Reinhartz, "John" in *Searching the Scriptures 2 A Feminist Commentary*, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with Ann Brock and Shelly Matthews (Crossroad, 1994), pp. 572-3; D'Angelo "Representations of Women in the Gospels of John and Mark," in *Women and Christian Origins*, edited by Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (Oxford, 1999), pp. 133-36.
- 11 Musa W. Dube, "Reading for Decolonization (John 4:1-42)" *Semeia* 75 (1996), 37-59. Torontle's novel is called *The Victims* (Botsalano Press, 1993).
- 12 *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (Continuum, 2001), p. 157; parentheses mine.

The Choreography of Feminist Theology

By Kathryn Reklis

In the final season of Big Love, the HBO drama about a polygamist family living in suburban Utah, Barbara Henrickson, the first wife of three, is coming to terms with her own feminist spiritual awakening.

Raised as a faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which repudiates polygamy, Barb had followed her monogamous husband out of the Mormon orthodoxy she knew and into a renegade fundamentalist Mormonism, plunging her into a plural marriage that now encompasses four spouses (three wives and a husband).

Central both to LDS theology and to the breakaway revivalist teachings the Henrickson family adhere to is the doctrine of the Melchizedek priesthood, which is conferred on all males, granting them the spiritual authority to issue priesthood blessings of healing, comfort, counsel, and strength to their children and wives and through this power to usher them into the celestial kingdom upon death. Barb is now causing a stir because she begins to believe and openly suggest that this priesthood belongs to all believers, including women, including herself.

A Debate Continues

As a feminist theologian engaged with popular culture, I think there is something thrilling about this kind of meaningful spiritual wrestling happening on television. As a younger theologian who came of age in the early 2000s, during the third and fourth waves of feminist thought, I have to admit there is also something disorienting about it. Within the protected space of academic theology, the question of whether women are equal spiritual leaders is a settled debate; presented as fresh and new in 2011, the topic can seem, well, very outdated. Look around a classroom at Yale or any of its peer seminaries and half the seats are probably filled with women. Visit a mainline Protestant church and you will see the same in the pews. Chances are at least one female clergy will lead you in worship.

Nevertheless, Barb's fictionalized experience, her turbulent emerging spiritual claims for herself, is not a period piece from the distant past, nor is it limited to small breakaway churches. Many of the fastest growing forms of Christianity in the world – Mormonism, Pentecostalism, Roman Catholicism – deny ordination to women and teach theology that subjugates women to men, spiritually and socially.

Barb's journey is a vivid reminder that feminist theology always begins in the lived experiences of women. It began when Mary Daly, some fifty years ago, sat enraptured at the Second Vatican Council, brimming with hope that her church might indeed change, only to despair when she looked around the room and realized she was the only woman present

The real measure of feminist theology's health is not whether the Barbs of the world find their way to academic theology, but whether feminist theology finds its way to Barb.

and would never be allowed to speak. It began when theologian Valerie Saiving realized that all the terms she encountered about "man's universal predicament" in sin really were about "men" and did not begin to touch on the experience of real women. And it began when women got together and began to talk about their experiences in church, in the home, in the classroom. As a full-blown intellectual, activist, liberationist pursuit, feminist theology does not just begin in these experiences and epiphanies, but must always remain anchored in them, asking itself

if it indeed has anything to say to the continued oppression and suffering of women and if it provides resources and succor to women and men struggling for planetary and human flourishing.

Challenging the notion of disembodied reason reigning from an ivory tower, feminist theory and theology staked a claim in a type of intellectual pursuit that was not superior to everyday experience or even abstracted from it, but that took embodied experience as the source for theological reflection and the amelioration of that experience as its end. As a kind of theological discourse, this anchor in experience does not mean that feminist theology does not take on the big metaphysical or intellectual questions. Indeed, trying to make sense of women's experience leads us to the depths of metaphysical speculation and the farthest reaches of theorizing about the structures of human civilization.

Peeling Back Layers

That journey looks something like this: like Barb on *Big Love* you start with experience – often with one woman's experience, in a particular time and place. What confronts you most strongly as you pull back the layers of oppression and inequality is how normalized they are. How every aspect of your life – from assumptions about how to raise

As an academic pursuit, has feminist theology become a hedonistic pleasure for a few well-educated white North American women?

your children, to the products you are encouraged to buy, to the language that is used all around you, to the way people interact with you on a bus – supports and reinforces a universe where you are less equal than men, or if you have brown skin or live in a certain part of town, are less equal even than other women. The damaging injustices that come with that inequality do not seem unjust to most people in this universe. It's just the way things are. So you keep peeling back the layers, trying to figure out what cloaks these assumptions in the garment of inevitability, naturalism, and reality.

Barb, for example, tries to believe that her new stirrings are just a matter of personal conviction: she has a spiritual testimony to her own priesthood status, and she does not understand why this should be so challenging to her husband, her sister-wives, her entire religion. As she perseveres, however, it becomes clear to her that her seemingly simple acknowledgement of a spiritual experience,

framed by a religion that places great emphasis on personal testimony, in fact challenges the deepest assumptions about the gendered pattern of human life, and most profoundly, the identity of God as Heavenly Father.

Big Love will probably not end with Barb enrolling in a Ph.D. program in theology, but her dive beneath the surface of her experience into the structures that make that surface seem necessary and natural is the same move that grounds all feminist theory. In theology this dive must go even deeper, to the very way we think, talk, and experience God. As Grace Jantzen, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and others have argued, if feminist theory wants to understand the deepest structures that ground women's inequality in society, it must concern itself with theology as well – with that primary ground of Western philosophy and theory, the divine/world relationship. This is the argument feminist theology presses upon the larger academy: that knowledge must be grounded in human experience, but understanding that experience means being willing to investigate and challenge the foundational assumptions of our thought, even the very language and images we use for God. Which is to say that feminist theology must always concern itself with both the deepest reaches of metaphysics and the farthest reaches of theory in order to concern itself always with the embodied existence of real women.

Glimmering Threads

As someone who has followed the glimmering thread of feminist theology into these deepest and farthest reaches, I can attest to the difficulty of seeing my way back to the everyday experience that set me forth in the first place. Harder still is holding both serious intellectual pursuit and liberationist relevance in tension when the real-life experience of women driving the project is not just infused with very real spiritual inequalities, but material suffering and oppression of an even greater magnitude. Bearing a female-identified body in this world greatly increases the chance that you will die from war, poverty, disease, childbirth, or unclean drinking water, as well as suffer the violence and degradation of rape, abuse, and forced maternity. If your body is also yellow, brown, or black the systematization of sexism and sexually motivated violence will be compounded by the violence and oppressions of racism and classism.

What, then, to make of this dual reality as a feminist theologian? On the one hand, feminist theology has gained acceptance in the academy. Within the relative intellectual freedom found there, we can

write, argue, and advocate for radically inclusive ontologies, new metaphysics, or the overthrow of both in a post-structuralist non-dualist deconstruction. On the other hand, what good are all these abstract theological systems or theoretical flights of fancy if they have no bearing on women's real lives? As an academic pursuit, has feminist theology become a hedonistic pleasure for a few well-educated white North American women?

The Slow Work of Ideas

If there is a defense to be made for feminist theology, that defense must always be haunted by the threat of its own irrelevance. This is true for all academic disciplines, and perhaps more true now than ever. We live in an age of information overload where the slow work of ideas to bring change and challenge injustices seems less plausible than perhaps it did even fifty years ago. When political revolutions can be fomented by 140-character tweets, and news is disseminated in sound bites twenty-four hours a day, an intellectual exchange published in books over several decades will inevitably seem disconnected from the world of real politics. To believe in the value of the liberal arts or the pursuit of higher education at all is to insist that certain kinds of knowledge cannot be had through a quick Google search or a Wiki link.

Because it insists that all academic or theoretical knowledge must be connected to embodied experience, feminist theology feels a more exacting burden to prove the slow power of ideas to effect change. It faces the nearly impossible task of insisting both that ideas only matter so far as they have something to say to real human beings *and* that fundamental change in the structures of oppression cannot take place without the careful intellectual and theoretical work needed to understand and challenge them.

The Verve of Theology

This tension, however, is also what gives feminist theology its verve – the buzzing energy that keeps it alive and propels it forward. It also helps explain why at its best feminist theology eschews “totalizing” narratives. Any move to draw comprehensive philosophical conclusions will be warily viewed as the projection of one person's particular experience to cover all human experience, inevitably excluding any experience that does not fit the mold – for instance, the way white educated man's experience was projected to account for all humankind and in the process privilege his own. Even the basic assumption that theology must be rooted in experience is challenged by feminist theologians who ask what is “experience” and how is it constructed!

This unrelenting questioning can be exhausting. I have conversations with students (almost always young white students) who want to know why we can't move beyond race, or class, or religious difference, to some unified theory of everything. I know that for many of them what they are expressing is a desire for unity, solidarity, and common ground in the midst of indefatigable capitalism that encourages each of us to create our own unique identities through the proliferating commodities we can buy with the click of a mouse. But, as I try to explain, there is also a kind of laziness in this desire. Totalizing narratives are in fact easier to create than the kind of real understanding and solidarity that emerge out of the slow and steady work of encountering differences.

The desire also assumes that no real unity can exist amid real differences. Feminist theology – and her sister theologies, Womanist, *mujerista*, Asian feminist, and others – insists the opposite: unity is the product of relationships, which require us to meet each other in the places where we live, in honesty, in brokenness, and in trust. This work is never finished, because human relationships are never done, but are renewed in every encounter. Feminist theology, then, is like a dance. A dancer's body conveys beauty in tension – extending in two directions at once, taut lines joined by graceful coordination. Feminist theology's beauty consists in the body extended in tension – between theory and practice, unity and difference.

Leaning Forward

I've been watching the final season of *Big Love* on Sunday nights while also preparing to participate in a course on Monday nights at Union Theological Seminary that explores the frontiers of feminist and Womanist theologies. Co-taught by Serene Jones, Jeannine Hill-Fletcher, and Eboni Marshall, the course invites feminist, Womanist, and *mujerista* theologians from the greater Northeast to speak about the growing edges of their work. The topics under discussion beautifully demonstrate that new choreography is propelling the dance of feminist theology forward with as much energy as ever. From its roots in the criticism of gendered language in scripture and liturgy and its early advocacy of the full spiritual equality of women, feminist theology today is wrestling with a new set of questions and challenges.

This list includes the need for deeper interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism, the challenges of transsexual and transgendered experience to feminist essentialism, the role of technology in re-wiring human experience, the devastating global condi-

tions of women's reproductive and maternal health – as well as doubts raised about the relevance of feminist theology as an academic discipline in the face of religious and political violence and unprecedented economic disparity, both of which disproportionately affect women and their children.

The Company of Women

Each week the conversations ignite an intellectual energy that is palpable. Far from languishing as a marginal academic discipline, feminist theology and her sister theologies demonstrate, in the hands of this company of women, a depth and rigor that make clear their relevance to the biggest questions of the human condition. Even more strongly, the setting of these conversations stretches the taut sinew between theory and practice. In the audience are students from Union, Fordham University, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York Theological Seminary, and General Theological Seminary, as well as close to eighty public participants, almost all women, many of them clergy, chaplains, or lay leaders. In this pedagogical moment, ideas are accountable to real-life experience. How does a theory of religious difference play out in a PTA meeting where Jewish, Hindu, and Christian mothers have to decide on a school lunch plan? How can a Presbyterian pastor in an aging congregation minister to the needs of two transgendered young women who keep popping into services? What does it mean, theologically, for 90 percent of the people in the room to rely on Facebook and Twitter for their sense of engagement in global politics?

Bringing all these questions into play is the choreography that keeps the dance of feminist theology moving with grace, energy, and power.

As I listen to these Monday night conversations, I often hope there is a Barb in the room. Then I realize the real measure of feminist theology's health is not whether the Barbs of the world find their way to academic theology, but whether feminist theology finds its way to Barb. Which means the dance must go on, never surrendering the tension that gives it form.

Kathryn Reklis '04 M.A.R. is a Ph.D. candidate in theology at Yale and the Director of Theological Initiatives at Union Theological Seminary. In addition to her academic writing, she is co-author of a blog on popular culture, where she writes about the feminist theological implications of Big Love and other great TV (<http://themothchase.wordpress.com>).



The Rev. Carol Pinkham Oak '85 M.Div. has been rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Ellicott City, Md., since 2006. With twenty-five years of parish ministry experience, she is also actively involved in the Lilly Endowment's Transition into Ministry initiative. That program nurtures new clergy by focusing on mentoring by experienced clergy, ensuring that the congregation offers a supportive climate for clergy growth and learning, and encouraging a wide array of clergy skills through involvement in all aspects of congregational life.

Times Have Changed

During my time at YDS, women seminarians were seeking role models. Joan Forsberg and Margaret Farley were our mentors. Now, women clergy are role models for one another, seeking to grow through peer relationships and through exposure to the many experiences of church. It raises the confidence level of everyone. Women's leadership isn't novel anymore. Now it's just as important as men's leadership..

A New Style

Clergywomen will not be isolated or defined in their ministry in traditional ways. When I graduated from seminary twenty-five years ago, the traditional attitude was: the only focus was your ministry. But women in ministry came along and said, wait a minute. I have these other relationships too – perhaps as a mother or a spouse, relationships growing from other areas of my life, through my children's schools or my interests. This network of relationship helps women bring a sense of teamwork to ministry.

Decisive Early Years

God is calling forth a new church. And that is exciting, but the ministry for which you are preparing will not look like the ministry any of us has known thus far. If you seek to be the best pastor you can be and want to thrive in a changing church landscape, then find a clergy mentor for your first three years of ministry. Exceptional mentoring programs are emerging across the church. Those early years can be negative or positive, but they will be formative. You are changing into a pastor, hopefully growing into it in the wonderful ways God intends. After all, God led you to this calling. This is a time of integrating your identity, bringing together your academic learning with congregational-life learning. Find your preaching voice. Develop healthy habits of self-care and spiritual practices.

Generation Next

As women in ministry we now have a generation of experience to draw on. I had to fight for maternity leave. I had to resist the culture that said you will be available every single moment. We are generating a new culture. Women of this generation will make their own contributions in as-yet-undefined ways, but they will discover their way. And they will give the next generation even more to build on.

American Dream, American Nightmare: Poverty Today

By Leslie G. Woods

Because the poor are left behind by the American Dream, we do not have a good vocabulary for acknowledging the reality of poverty in the United States. Yet poverty is part of our story today, and a part of women's stories everywhere.

The anxiety and suffering it causes is likely to intensify in this era of fiscal hysteria, economic doldrums, and budget cuts.

Poverty overwhelms nearly 44 million Americans today.¹ Most of them are women and children: six out of ten poor adults in the U.S. are women, and one in five people living in poverty is under the age of 18.² One in three single women with dependents lives in poverty, compared to one in six men.³ Women earn only 80 cents to every dollar earned by their male counterparts.⁴

It is hard for the rest of us – me included – to conceive of the pain and anxiety a woman feels when she cannot afford to fill a prescription for a sick child. It is difficult for me to grasp how a woman chooses between paying the rent and putting food on the table. It is hard for me to imagine relying only

It is hard for the rest of us – me included – to conceive of the pain and anxiety a woman feels when she cannot afford to fill a prescription for a sick child.

on an emergency room for medical care. It is impossible to envision leaving my son in an unstable child-care situation so that I can work a minimum wage job (or two or three) that fails to cover my family's expenses anyway. It is alarming to learn that, at the bottom of the income scale, a poor woman pays more for just about everything – food, transportation, financial services, credit – than I, who have access to big grocery stores and fancy banks.

Poor women face colossal odds and painful choices as they work to try to make a decent life for their families. This is the face and the fact of poverty. So why are so many Americans trapped in a cycle of poverty? Whose responsibility is it to confront this issue? And how do we do so faithfully?

Vicious Cycles

I believe the poverty cycle begins and ends with wages – income inequality and the wage gap. Solving these two fundamental injustices will have a significant impact in reducing poverty in the U.S.

Income inequality refers to the gap between the top and the bottom of the income scale. According to the Economic Policy Institute's "The State of Working America," income growth from 1947-1973 was about the same at all levels of the income scale. The poorest 20 percent of families enjoyed economic gains at about the same rate as the top 20 percent.⁵ But since 1979, the rate of increase for the bottom 90 percent has slowed; the bottom 20 percent has suffered outright stagnation and loss. By contrast, the top ten percent's dramatic rate of increase has handed them a disproportionately large share of the overall growth of the economy. In the period from 1979-2005, the share of economic gains for the top ten percent of income earners has grown to 63.6 percent. The top one percent alone claims a whopping 38.7 percent of all economic gains during that period.⁶ Today, nearly half of this nation's wealth is owned by those in the top one percent of the income scale.⁷

The second injustice is the wage gap between women and men. The latest statistics show that,

on average, women earn about 80 cents for every dollar earned by their male colleagues.⁸ When the Equal Pay Act was first enacted in 1963, a woman who worked full-time earned, on average, 59 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Over the decades, the gap has narrowed, but slowly.⁹ Economist Evelyn Murphy, president of The Wage Project, estimates that over a lifetime (47 years of full-time work) this gap amounts to a loss in wages of \$700,000 for a female high school graduate, \$1.2 million for a female college graduate, and \$2 million for a professional school graduate. Predictably, this wage gap is felt most keenly at the bottom, where retail, child care, and domestic workers, who are primarily women, are disproportionately underpaid and rarely receive benefits.

Capitol Hill Battles

One recent legislative effort to provide protection from the persistent wage gap has been successful: the 111th Congress passed, and the President signed, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act to strengthen female workers' rights to challenge pay discrimination.

But other bills have stalled. The Senate failed to end debate on the Paycheck Fairness Act, a bill that amends and improves the Equal Pay Act of 1963 by strengthening anti-discrimination laws, protecting workers who inquire into colleagues' salaries, and strengthening penalties for equal-pay violations. Nor has Congress passed the Healthy Families Act, which would create a minimum labor standard allowing workers to earn up to seven days annually of paid, job-protected sick leave for illness or to care for a sick family member. Though not likely to move in the current Congress, such legislation would make important strides for the rights and benefits of low-wage workers, and especially of women in the workforce.

Ripping the Safety Net

While we wait for elected leaders to enact remedies, these injustices in our wage system are only exacerbated by the recession and sluggish recovery. But they existed before this economic crisis and will endure beyond this recovery. We therefore must address them in order to address poverty in the U.S., no matter what the economic climate. Poor people cannot afford basic necessities because they do not, and many cannot, earn enough to meet their basic needs. Promoters of the self-made American Dream would have us believe that any child born in this country has an equal chance at wealth and success, but the reality is different: we have structured our

economy so that, despite rare exceptions, upward mobility is now virtually impossible to achieve for the average person.

Despite the national love affair with rugged individualism, those who are born into poverty are less likely to finish high school and more likely to live in poverty as adults than their young peers raised in affluence.¹⁰ The welfare state no longer exists. We have cut away many work supports for low-wage workers and are threatening more; the working poor is a real class of people who are struggling to tread water, and were doing so even before the Great Recession. These failures are a direct result of the heedless, intensified individualism of our time and the elevation of love of self above love of neighbor.

Smaller World, Bigger Responsibility

So, what is our responsibility? I challenge the rhetoric saturating our national debate that argues for spending cuts as the only way to get our fiscal house in order. Our society cannot afford the cuts proposed in Congress, both for the remainder of this fiscal year or for the next. Such draconian measures will only result in more disparity, more desperation, more poverty. We are called by Jesus to love our neighbor, which means caring about what happens in our society and in the world. The individualistic trend of hoarding money and possessions will only lead to more brokenness in a shrinking world that is increasingly interconnected. It is our collective responsibility – and it is in our own economic and spiritual self-interest – to ensure that everyone else is doing well. A commitment to the common good is not only our Biblical calling, but also a pragmatic approach toward the just and safe ordering of society.

In his "Remaining Awake through the Great Revolution" address delivered at Morehouse College in 1959, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. perfectly captured this theological and practical truth: "In the final analysis all life is interrelated. No nation or individual is independent; we are interdependent. We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality. As long as there is poverty in the world I can never be rich, even if I possess a billion dollars. ... Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be."¹¹

Our federal spending choices as a nation reflect collective priorities. Cuts that target the poor are the last place we should turn for savings in the federal budget. Instead, we should seek a measured approach to deficit reduction that balances cutting wasteful spending with a just tax policy that ensures enough federal revenue to meet obligations to the most vulnerable at home and around the world.

Some will argue that poverty alleviation is the role of the church and not of the government, but it is beyond our means or ability to solve the persistent crisis of poverty on our own. The charity and justice ministries of the church require public partnership and investment; the church cannot eradicate poverty alone.

Until every job in this country, whether held by a woman or a man, pays a true living wage, with access to paid sick leave, health coverage, and enough money to meet the basic needs of families, we must continue public and private investments in those programs that help people fill the gap between what they earn and what they need.

As I write this, I am heartsick that we live in such a broken world. But I believe that change is possible and that we are called to bring it about ourselves, with God's help. It is my prayer that, rather than merely creating for ourselves a useful vocabulary for speaking about U.S. poverty, we will work to eradicate poverty itself, so that there will no longer be a need for such language. It is my prayer that the current debate about fiscal discipline will lead to a federal budget that reflects a respect for all people, puts our treasure where our hearts are, and ensures that those who can afford to contribute more to the common good do so. Most especially, it is my prayer that no woman in my child's generation will ever have to choose between providing a roof and feeding her family.

Leslie G. Woods '05 M.A.R. serves as the Representative for Domestic Poverty & Environmental Issues at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness in Washington, DC.

Notes

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Closing the Gender Gap One Nation at a Time

Iceland is the world's top-ranking nation for providing opportunities to women and closing the gender gap, according to the annual Global Gender Gap Report.

Produced by the World Economic Forum, the report indexes 134 countries by measures of economic opportunity, health, education attainment, and political empowerment. On that basis, the U.S. ranks 19th, breaking into the top 20 for the first time. The U.S.'s improved performance is based partly on a strong record of education equality and economic opportunity. But it falters for a lack of female representation in Congress and state government.

Other high rankers include Ireland (6), Spain (11) and the United Kingdom (15). Luxemburg and Greece made the biggest strides, increasing their rankings because of gains in women's political and economic participation.

At the bottom were Pakistan (132), Chad (133), and Yemen (134). The numbers for the Mideast are in some ways skewed, officials said, because even though women might enroll in universities there at the same rate as men, they are often prevented from joining the work force. Though Iceland and the Scandinavian nations lead the world in narrowing gender inequities, no nation has yet eliminated the gender gap completely.

"Women and girls must be treated equally if a country is to grow and prosper," says Klaus Schwab, chair of the World Economic Forum.

"We still need a true gender equality revolution, not only to mobilize a major pool of talent both in terms of volume and quality, but also to create a more compassionate value system within all our institutions."

Source: Global Economic Forum <http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-gender-gap>.

A Balm in Gilead?

By Marie M. Fortune

Violence against women is the common, shared experience of women across ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, ability, and faith tradition. On every continent, women share either the fear or the memory of personal violence or both. This is a fact of life that girls learn early on. The commonplace reporting of individual incidents of personal violence or of hate crimes against women in public, combined with the incessant portrayals of the victimization of women in media, reinforces our awareness that the threat of violence is the air we breathe.

I recently traveled in South Africa and met with NGOs and colleagues who are addressing violence against women and children. They call it “gender-based violence,” which I think is a helpful way to name this scourge of intimate violence that most frequently is visited upon women by men. (Men and boys can also be victimized by intimate physical or sexual violence but the obvious demographic pattern of this social problem cannot be ignored.)

Paradigms of Violence

Women and girls are the most likely victims, yet we need to acknowledge that gender-based violence is actually not a women’s problem. As women, we have to live with the consequences, but it is by and large a men’s problem: it is manifest and sustained in the heart of patriarchal and misogynist culture, which remains a dominant paradigm globally even in the twenty-first century. In the end, only men can transform their values, behaviors, and attitudes towards women; only they can give up their entitlements and expectations, choosing instead to respect and honor women, i.e. “the wombs that bore you.” (Qur’an 4:1) Accordingly, men have three choices: they can participate in using violence and control in their relationships; they can stand by silently while other men do so; or they can stand

with women and call other men to account for their gender-based violence.

There is a story attributed to a Cherokee grandfather about a conversation with his grandson who asks him why some people do bad things. Grandfather replies, “Every person has two wolves inside us.

Women and girls are the most likely victims, yet gender-based violence is actually not a women’s problem. It is by and large a men’s problem.

One wolf is kind and generous, respectful of others, just and charitable. The other wolf is hateful and aggressive, violent and oppressive.” “Well, Grandfather, which wolf wins?” Grandfather answers, “The one you feed.” Regardless of a person’s own history and experience, he or she has a choice.

Right now we are in a period of women’s resistance to gender-based violence. Since the 1970s, women in the U.S. and around the world have taken the risk of naming their experiences of violence, even at the risk of “having it bruised and misunderstood,” as writer-activist Audre Lorde once put it. Many are trying to transform institutions and cultures that still tolerate gender-based violence as the norm.

Women's resilience remains remarkable in the face of years of abuse. A South African woman whose husband had abused her for years and threatened to kill her said, as she walked away from him: "Nobody will take me out of this world except God." Another asserted that "the only time a woman should bend down is to help up another woman." Survivors continue to be the backbone of advocacy and social change efforts across the globe. The story of the widow in Luke 18 is acted out daily by women who simply want justice.

Religious faith is fundamental to ending gender-based violence. To be sure, a critical look at most of the world's faith traditions suggests that at this point in history, we still live with *religion in service to patriarchy*; that is, patriarchy supplies the value system that begets the various oppressions of

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persons and, with few exceptions, faith traditions have served to reinforce and perpetuate patriarchy. Patriarchy forms the foundation of gender-based violence.

Some believe this oppression is inherent in religion altogether. The corruption, distortion, and abuse within faith traditions make too many people cynical and hopeless. Too often, sacred texts are employed to excuse or justify the control and abuse of women and children. An advocate once called me because she was working with an 8-year-old incest victim; her father had told her that the Bible said it was okay for him to have sex with her. The child was learning about the Bible in Sunday School and believed her father. The advocate was asking me where this appeared in the Bible. I of course said it wasn't in the Bible. But the father's misuse of scripture had allowed him to coerce his daughter and sexually abuse her.

Distracted Debates

Sadly, the churches' protracted, depleting debates over sexual orientation and culture wars during the last forty years have distracted us from addressing the real needs of children, youth, and adults affected by sexual and domestic violence.

Nevertheless, many of us continue to assert that the core teachings of our faith traditions in

fact stand over against this narrative of violence and call us to a deeper and fuller understanding. We resonate with the prophet Jeremiah (8:22-9:2) "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored? ... O that my eyes were a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! O that I had a shelter in the desert that I might leave my people and go away from them!"

The misuse of that which was created for good, the consequent suffering, and the vision of redemption make up the primary narrative our Christian tradition. The gospel hymn answers with certainty: "There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole. There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul."

And indeed many people of faith have persisted in addressing gender-based violence. Grassroots women are organizing to support each other. Clergy have gotten additional training and are working alongside advocates in their communities to provide services and change laws. Some denominations have begun to initiate programs to better equip congregations for both prevention and intervention. Some youth ministries are educating teens and providing a safe place for them to disclose abuse and ask for help. Some marriage prep programs are now addressing the partners' histories of abuse and the possibilities of abuse in their relationship. Denominations have taken initial steps in addressing clergy misconduct. Some seminaries are preparing faith leaders to know how to respond to disclosures of abuse by a congregant.

Heeding the Voices

In the work of feminist and Womanist theologies, addressing violence in women's lives is an absolute necessity. Feminist and Womanist Christians have pressed the academy and the church to listen, learn, and respond to the voices of those who have been victimized by domestic terror, battering, sexual assault, and abuse. Many of these voices are those of survivors who have spoken out in spaces created by feminist and Womanist theology. They are silent no more and are calling the church to be the church and affirm the ways that the Christian faith, if it is true to the Gospel that Jesus taught, is part of the solution and a bountiful resource not only for healing and restoration of body and soul, but also for justice and prevention.

Nevertheless, a brutal fact remains: in the U.S., one in three people who gather weekly for worship are survivors of gender-based violence. There are

still priests and Levites who pass by on the other side, and too few Samaritans who stop and get involved.

As we consider the slow progress made in churches against gender inequality and violence against women, we are reminded that a sailboat

Sadly, the churches' depleting debates over sexual orientation and culture wars during the last forty years have distracted us from addressing sexual and domestic violence.

cannot sail directly towards its destination. Rather it must tack its way, back and forth, but always moving forward. Those of us who are fortunate enough to sail these boats need only keep watch and keep faith and prepare to pass the tillers along to the next generation.

Our vision is not of a world without gender-based violence; this is not realistic. Rather, our vision is of a world in which gender-based violence is rare and peculiar, is no longer part of the fabric of women's memories. This world is possible if we choose life over death, respect over control, and justice over injustice in both our intimate and public lives.

As people of faith, we have only to be willing to look at ourselves and our churches through the lens of gender-based violence, to name our own experiences, and to call those who do harm to account. Letting these experiences in, allowing them to challenge us, will inevitably reshape the way we do ministry, church and seminary.

The way things are is not the way they have to be.

Do not accept it because your mother did.

Perhaps she did what she had to do then.

Do not follow unquestioning in your father's footsteps.

He may have chosen a path you do not want.

You must do what you can do now. You must choose for yourself.

Someday sexuality will be celebrated and shared as God's gift by all people.

Someday equality will be an erotic experience and violence will be abhorred.

Someday people will choose one another freely and rejoice in their choosing.

That day is within our reach.

We need not wait for another life, another incarnation, another generation.

In the dailiness of our lives, with those we love, we can do this differently.

Marie M. Fortune '76 M.Div. is founder and senior analyst of FaithTrust Institute, a national, multifaith organization based in Seattle (see www.faithtrustinstitute.org). An author, teacher, pastor, and activist ordained in the United Church of Christ, she is considered a pioneer in the field of religion and domestic violence and an expert on sexual exploitation by religious leaders. She served on the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women for the U.S. Department of Justice (1994-2002) and on the Task Force on Domestic Violence for the U.S. Defense Department (2000-2003). She founded and edited the Journal of Religion and Abuse from 2000-2008.

AS IF THERE WERE ONLY ONE

By Martha Serpas

In the morning God pulled me onto the porch,
a rain-washed gray and brilliant shore.
I sat in my orange pajamas and waited.
God said, "Look at the tree." And I did.
Its leaves were newly yellow and green,
slick and bright, and so alive it hurt
to take the colors in. My pupils grew
hungry and wide against my will.
God said, "Listen to the tree."
And I did. It said, "live!"
And it opened itself wider, not with desire,
but the way I imagine a surgeon spreads
the ribs of a patient in distress and rubs
her paralyzed heart, only this tree parted
its own limbs toward the sky – I was the light in that sky.
I reached in to the thick, sweet core
and I lifted it to my mouth and held it there
for a long time until I tasted the word
tree (because I had forgotten its name).
Then I said my own name twice softly.
Augustine said, God loves each one of us as if
there were only one of us, but I hadn't believed him.
And God put me down on the steps with my coffee
and my cigarettes. And, although I still
could not eat nor sleep, that evening
and that morning were my first day back.



The Lunch Meeting
© Bobbie Pearson

Women Missionaries, Global Entrepreneurs

By Jennifer A. Herdt

In the nineteenth century, mission work offered an outlet for the creative energies of women, who were free to assume leadership roles overseas that would have been denied to them at home.¹

Mission societies sent women missionaries around the globe. They also funded indigenous women evangelists, working in partnership with local populations, with the goal of helping them become self-sustaining. They set up educational institutions at all levels, especially for girls, founded hospitals, and worked to abolish foot binding, female infanticide, and sex trafficking. They addressed the welfare of women in ways that improved nutrition, health, and education for all. Beyond this, they provided a spiritual framework for their work, articulating theologically their reasons for being there in ways that did not reduce local peoples to passive recipients, exploitable labor, or mere consumers.

Unfortunately, as these missionary institutions were turned over to national churches, women's ministries often lost their autonomy or collapsed due to lack of support from male leaders. And as a broader range of economic opportunities opened up for women, fewer committed themselves to work in worldwide mission.

A New World Mission

Ironically, though, a great deal of that missionary legacy of women's leadership anticipates the best of what is going on today on the global scene. Some of the most important global development work in recent decades has moved in directions embodied by these nineteenth-century women's missionary societies – notably, the pragmatism of collaborative, sustainable models of local development, led by women and emphasizing the needs of women.

In generations past, these initiatives were marginalized and underappreciated. And there were of

course colonialist and neocolonialist aspects of the mission movement that we must identify and confess. Yet we should recall the missionary women's spirit and wisdom as women increasingly take a leadership role today in global development efforts.

But there are other insights to recover. The enthusiasm for new market-based approaches to combatting global poverty often suffers from its own poverty – the inadequacy of utilitarian assumptions about human nature that are now so culturally ubiquitous. If we listen, we can discern a thirst for a more adequate, realistic anthropology – a theological anthropology – and promote that perspective as a new sort of mission to the world.

An International Twist

My own connection to the world of global development is a personal one. In 1973, when I was five years old, my family and I arrived in the Philippines. We spent the next ten years there, amid the international community of scientists of the International Rice Research Institute. It was in the heady days of the Green Revolution, which tripled rice yields globally in a decade, enabling Asia to feed its burgeoning population. In 1973, there was only one female senior scientist on the Institute staff. The wives of the internationally recruited staff played mahjong and bridge, went to Bible studies and parties, nurtured the next generation, and supervised the household servants. The few professionals among them – a doctor, a nurse – chafed at the bit, but held visas that did not permit them to work. My experience was, I think, a lot like growing up in the U.S. in the 1950s, only with an international twist.

Much has changed in international agricultural research since then. Researchers continue their pursuit of higher yields to feed growing populations, but it is paired now with an ever-increasing emphasis on sustainability. The scientific community's enthusiasm for biotechnology is now paired with a commitment not just to educating scientists from the Two-Thirds World but to partnership with local farmers. In Africa, this often means collaborating with women, who are responsible for much of the farming.² There is also a growing component of women scientists; at the International Rice Research Institute, where I spent my childhood, 40 percent of the senior staff are now women.³

A Shift Toward Women

These shifts – the new strategies of partnership, the rise of female leadership – echo some of the most positive themes pioneered by the earlier women's missionary societies. They are hardly limited to the sphere of international agricultural research. They are also reflected in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000. The Gender Equity and Maternal Health MDGs target women in particular, and the Universal Education MDG would close a gap that is far greater for women than for men. It has been shown that aid that is focused on women has a greater impact on the common good.⁴ Improving women's income translates into better nutrition for whole families; the same is not true of improving the income of men. Educating women results in lower birth rates and rates of disease. Furthermore, microloans to women have higher rates of success, and the microcredit movement has thus been largely directed toward women.⁵

Initiatives today abound that involve women in the search for solutions to the world's greatest challenges. One example is Oxfam's Sisters on the Planet, which focuses both on raising awareness concerning how poor women are disproportionately affected by climate change and on coordinating the collaborative responses of women.⁶

Half the Sky

Another feature of new approaches to combatting global poverty is the set of experiments by social entrepreneurs, practitioners who integrate market structures into solutions for nurturing material wealth and human flourishing. Here, too, women are playing a leadership role. In *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, authors Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn document the transformative involvement of women leaders in this entrepreneurial surge.⁷ The authors

believe problems of poverty and political extremism are best addressed by solutions that realize women's power as economic catalysts.

"The tide in history is turning women from beasts of burden and sexual playthings into full-fledged human beings," they write. "The economic advantages of empowering women are so vast as to persuade nations to move in that direction."

Philanthropic capitalists, meanwhile, complement the efforts of social entrepreneurs by providing capital such as long-term loans at very low interest. One outstanding exemplar of the new philanthropy is Jacqueline Novogratz, founder of the Acumen Fund, a nonprofit venture capital firm that invests in sustainable global enterprises to help the poor. Novogratz gave up a well-paying job on Wall Street in the 1980s to work for a nonprofit microfinance organization for women. Since then, she has worked to reinvent traditional charity in ways that foster local creativity and preserve the initiative of poor people.

Facing Good, Facing Evil

One of Novogratz's first assignments was to evaluate the prospects for a microcredit program for women in pre-genocide Rwanda. She collaborated with a remarkable group of women there, including three women then serving on the country's parliament: Prudence, Constance, and Agnes. Constance, who led the way in dramatically reducing the bride price in Rwanda, was later killed in what Novogratz believes was an intentional hit-and-run automobile "accident." Prudence and Agnes lived through Rwanda's genocidal bloodbath in 1994 and were afterwards accused of crimes of genocide, though the charges against Prudence were eventually dropped. Seeking to understand how Agnes could have gone from playing a leadership role in building a better future for women of all ethnic groups in Rwanda to urging the mass extermination of Tutsis, Novogratz met with her in prison. Afterwards, Novogratz mused: "Many individuals believe that if women ruled the world, we'd finally have a chance at peace. While that may be true, Agnes stood as a reminder that power corrupts on an equal-opportunity basis. Agnes loved the trappings of power, and when all was said and done, she'd traded integrity and whatever good she'd built for glitter and gold."⁸

This is an important lesson. Amid the newfound enthusiasm for prioritizing women in development efforts and in the search for creative solutions to global challenges, we must be careful not to lay the messianic mantle on women. Here the church can

provide indispensable wisdom for naming original sin and rejecting utopianism without losing our commitment to social transformation.

If Novogratz struggled to come to terms with the banality of evil as confronted in the face of Agnes, she was equally stunned by the power of forgiveness she witnessed among survivors of the genocide. In a gathering of Hutu and Tutsi women, all of whose husbands were either dead or imprisoned, Novogratz asked how they could sit together and listen to one another's stories. One woman responded: "We listen to one another and look into one another's eyes and we see suffering. It is that suffering that binds us. It is that suffering that reminds us that we are all human."⁹

An Ethical Language

We are not told whether this woman was Christian, though many of the women there witnessed to how their Christian faith sustained them through the genocide. But in any case, all who grasp that human beings are made in the image of God have a language for articulating the ethical demands that the sufferings of others make on us. Those who worship God incarnate in solidarity with suffering humanity have additional reason to feel the urgency of this mandate.

The church has something important to say in these economic, political arenas. It offers an anthropology, a framework for regarding the mysteries of human conduct, that could be useful to global development efforts in the face of both the worst and the best impulses of human behavior. Market structures can be part of our toolkit for addressing global poverty, political radicalism, and instability, helping to enhance human dignity and ensure that people establish for themselves a reliable flow of goods that is not dependent on the whim of donors. But if we treat people merely as consumers and rational profit-maximizers, we truncate their humanity and blind ourselves to their capacity for inhumanity.

Novogratz might sound "realistic" about human nature when she asserts: "Beauty, vanity, status, comfort: These are the levers that are pulled the world over as we make our decisions."¹⁰ But rational choice theory is unrealistic: it fails to grasp human beings' capacity for extraordinary compassion and sacrifice – together with their capacity to demonize others and violently deny their dignity.

Women involved in global development efforts today have a rich variety of self-understandings, but Christians might fruitfully see them as spiritual descendents of the women involved in those nineteenth-century mission societies. Today some

are agricultural scientists. Some are social entrepreneurs. Some are women taking out microloans to start a bakery or laundry. Some are women educating their neighbors about how to use bed nets to prevent malaria. Many are women of faith.

As the demographic center of gravity of world Christianity shifts southward, our understanding of mission is changing. The global challenges we face require our good will and commitment, together with scientific and technical expertise of all sorts – and the best theological insights we can bring to bear. Thankfully, these many endeavors are increasingly in the hands of women as well as men. We should not idealize the impact of women on global efforts. But neither can we regard the involvement of women as anything short of indispensable.

Jennifer Herdt joined the YDS faculty as professor of Christian Ethics in 2010 after eleven years at Notre Dame. Her books include Putting On Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices (University of Chicago, 2008). Her research interests include virtue ethics, religion's role in public life, and political theology.

Notes

- 1 For an overview, see Dana L. Robert, *Joy to the World: Mission in the Age of Global Christianity* (Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church, 2010), pp. 39-60.
- 2 Cheryl Doss, *Twenty-five Years of Research on Women Farmers in Africa: Lessons and Implications for Agricultural Research Organizations* (CIMMYT International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, 1999), p. 4.
- 3 "Gender and Diversity Program—CGIAR <http://www.genderdiversity.cgiar.org/>; accessed Jan. 2, 2011.
- 4 "Aid effectiveness, gender equality and women's development," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development http://www.oecd.org/document/62/0,3343,en_2649_34541_42288382_1_1_1_1,00.html; accessed Jan. 2, 2011.
- 5 For instance, 97 percent of the Grameen Bank's loans have been to women. http://www.grameen-info.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=112; accessed Jan. 3, 2011.
- 6 <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/files/climatechangewomen-factsheet.pdf>; accessed Jan. 3, 2011.
- 7 *Half the Sky* (Knopf, 2009).
- 8 *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World* (Rodale, 2009), p. 163.
- 9 Novogratz, *Blue Sweater*, p. 157.
- 10 Novogratz, p. 243.

In Remembrance of Wartime “Comfort Women”

By K. Christine Pae

It was an ordinary day at YDS when I stopped by York Pizza for a late-night snack. While waiting for a calzone, I chatted with the man who was folding the napkins next to my table. Our friendly banter turned into a somewhat awkward silence when he asked me where I was from. As soon as I told him Korea, he seemed startled. “Why are you guys trying to bomb us?” he asked.

“I’m sorry?” I did not understand what he was asking until he mumbled, “Korea is an axis of evil ... has nuclear weapons ... and wants to bomb us.”

“Well, that’s North Korea and I am from South Korea. There are two Koreas,” I explained.

When I recall this conversation, I am reminded that I am from a “war zone.”¹ Although I have never experienced armed conflict, my Korean identity sometimes gives me feelings of horror, uncertainty, and deep sorrow caused by war and by the division of the Korean peninsula. Ann Joh’s theological reflection translates these feelings that “The DMZ² reminds one of a visible scar, a wound running along the body of Korea ... This wound is constantly poked and torn open fresh with barely enough time to form a scab.”³

Life During Wartime

It was not an accident that I would focus my academic training of Christian feminist ethics on life during wartime – more specifically, how war affects women’s and men’s lives differently. This theological and intellectual curiosity first arose when I learned that the “comfort women” system, the system of military sexual slavery and forced military prostitution in Korea, was systematically controlled by the state and yet publicly silenced for the sake of international peace and security. Unfortunately, military prostitution and sexual slavery are found in almost every conflict zone, not just in Korea. The more I incorporate a feminist gender analysis of war into my theo-ethical contemplation on peacemaking, the

more convinced I am that excessive military-based security, as demonstrated by the gender-based wartime ordeal of the “comfort women” system in Korea, is a root cause of oppression of women

One of the legacies of the war was the practice of U.S. military prostitution, the use of Korean sex-workers who became America’s “comfort women.”

transnationally. Without analyzing and abolishing the gender-based military violence, “global peace” is mere empty rhetoric.

In “Your Comfort vs. My Death,” Korean feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung states that for Korean women, the “comfort woman” narrative is the “root story” of what it means to be a woman. This strange and familiar story haunts each Korean woman who hears it.⁴

During World War II, imperial Japan kidnapped or forcefully drafted women from their occupied territories, including Korea, Northern China, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Taiwan. These women were forced to be sexual slaves for Japanese soldiers. According to Chung, the system of comfort women that targeted many Korean women was instituted because 1) imperial Japan had to control the sexual desires and venereal diseases of its soldiers, who often raped local women or slept with sex workers, by providing allegedly clean Korean women, who

lived under the neo-Confucian law of chastity; and 2) some “comfort” and recreation had to be provided for Japanese soldiers, who were anxious about losing the war.⁵ Imperial Japan carried out its warfare at the cost of the bodies of comfort women.

Unfortunately, the comfort women system did not cease to exist when Korea won independence from imperial Japan after World War II. Rather, the system evolved into a new form for American soldiers.

For the Sake of National Security

Soon after gaining independence, the Korean War (1950-1953) broke out.⁶ The war was theologically justified by Christian realists such as Reinhold Niebuhr because the United States felt responsible for protecting democracy in the Far East against evil communist North Korea, allegedly controlled by China and the former Soviet Union.⁷

The real tragedy of the Korean War is not simply that the war resolved nothing, but that the country has been divided ever since, guaranteeing consistent, extreme tension between the North and South for six decades now. One of the legacies of the war was the practice of U.S. military prostitution, the use of Korean sex workers who became America’s “comfort women.”⁸

Throughout the Korean and Vietnam wars, the so-called Relaxation and Recreation business had been systematized around the U.S. military camps in South Korea. More than a million Korean women have sexually catered to U.S. soldiers for economic gain.⁹ Researching U.S. military prostitution in

A lack of women’s voices in theological discussion and peacemaking has dire effects on women. This may reflect women’s status in the Christian community.

South Korea, I learned that a significant number of Korean women entered the U.S. military sex industry in order to support their families and that these women were under governmental surveillance. Even today, camp towns around U.S. military bases import women from Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. U.S. military sex workers’ voices, in spite of their consistent experience of sexual assault, rape, physical abuse, and exploitation, have been silenced, both by the Korean government and U.S. forces in Korea, for the sake of national security.

The modern “comfort woman” system is no longer a unique issue in Korea or the root story only of Korean women, because gender-based wartime

sexual violence has become so common in various conflict zones. For instance, the International Red Cross’s study of post-conflict African countries found that in nations such as Rwanda, Sierra Leon, Congo, and Nigeria, survivors of rape or sexual violence are accused of adultery and prostitution.¹⁰ In the Rwandan genocide, the survivors of rape bore an estimated three thousand to five thousand children. These children, called the “unwanted children” or “children of bad memories,” have faced rejection from their society just as many bi-racial children of American soldiers and Korean sex workers have been ostracized in South Korea.¹¹

Uncontrollable Drives

Cynthia Enloe, a feminist scholar of international relations, argues that “in our society there is a widespread belief that soldiers’ sexuality is determined by uncontrollable ‘drives.’”¹² While sounding tough and manly regarding military matters, politicians secretly seek safe commercialized sex for soldiers with “uncontrollable” sexual drives in order to avoid the diplomatic issue of military rape in foreign countries. These politicians share a patriarchal assumption that sexual entertainment of soldiers is essential to maintaining military morale.¹³

Such cultural habits and prejudices are difficult to break. Because of its widespread practice, wartime sexual violence is habitually considered an unavoidable byproduct of armed conflict. Only recently has wartime rape been redefined as a crime under the Geneva Conventions – and only after an estimated two thousand to five thousand Bosnian Muslim women were systematically raped by Serbian soldiers.¹⁴

How can a Christian feminist analysis of military sexual violence such as the comfort women system change the discourse and practices of war and peacemaking? Here I present two suggestions.

First, women’s experience of wartime sexual violence must be examined in a theological framework. Instead of accepting wartime violence against women as a normal activity of modern warfare, we should insist that these horrific practices be judged by universal values of human dignity, integrity, and sacredness found at the center of God’s creation. Women’s perspectives on peace, an outgrowth of their particular experiences of war and militarism, must be included in Christian discourse on peacemaking.

Second, since women are the victims of armed conflicts across the globe, we should listen to women who are affected by war and wartime prejudice.

Our churches and institutions should be intentional and systematic about hearing women's witness to gender-based wartime violence – their experiences of military prostitution, rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy.

According to the United Nations' *The Impact of Violent Conflict on Women and Girls* (2002), where cultures of violence and discrimination against women and girls exist prior to conflict, they are exacerbated during conflict. A lack of women's voices in theological discussion and peacemaking has dire effects on women. This may reflect women's status in the Christian community, and the church's lack of commitment to protecting women's human rights. Truly without gender equality within our faith community, gender-based sexual violence during wartime will continue. Grounded in steadfast faith in God's peace and love, may we Christians liberate ourselves from gender inequality, violent conflict, hatred, and fear.

K. Christine Pae '03 M.Div. is assistant professor of Christian ethics at Denison University in Granville, OH.

Notes

- 1 Kwok Pui-Lan argues that before Asia emerged as a market for U.S. global capital, Asia was primarily seen as a war zone. See Kwok Pui-Lan, "Fishing the Asia Pacific" in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, eds. Rita Nakashima Brock (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 4.
- 2 The Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea, or the Truce Line.
- 3 Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 29.
- 4 Chung Hyun Kyung, "Your Comfort Vs. My Death," in *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*, eds. Mary John Mananzan (Wipf and Stock, 2004), p. 132.
- 5 Chung Hyun Kyung, pp. 133-34.
- 6 There are various perspectives on Korean War – ranging from a civil war to the first globalized war.
- 7 South Korea had been governed by the U.S. military from 1945 to 1948, while North Korea was under the Soviet Union. Lt. General John Hodge and his men were not politicians but warriors who had fought against imperial Japan in the Pacific for three years. When Hodge and his men landed at Incheon on Sept. 8, 1945, they carried with them "all of the prejudices and antagonisms generated by months of bitter warfare and propaganda against an Asian people." After the sudden surrender of Japan, Gen. Douglas MacArthur selected units on the basis of

availability and transport, not expertise. As a result, Hodge became "the only man in history who was appointed a ruler over 20 million people on the basis of shipping time." (Lisle Rose, *Roots of Tragedy: The United States and the Struggle for Asia, 1945-1953* [Greenwood Press, 1976], pp. 98-101).

- 8 Hye-Sun Kim, "American GIs and Paju" in *The Newsletters of Pa Ju County II*, (Pa Ju, South Korea, 1995).
- 9 Katherine Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 24-32.
- 10 Anne F. Murray, *From Outrage to Courage: Women Taking Action for Health and Justice* (Common Courage Press, 2008), p. 155.
- 11 Murray, p. 156.
- 12 Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (California, 2004), p. 119.
- 13 Enloe.
- 14 Murray, p. 140.

NAMING By Kathi Wolfe

I wasn't singing the body electric.
Hearing the doctor say
distraction fracture
is an injury
that distracts from real pain,
I asked the gods
of Percocet and punctured ears,
if I'd ever know what hit me.
If I didn't know if I was an I,
I wondered, shuttering my eyes
against broken shooting stars,
would I think, would I be an "I am"?
Still, this one thing I knew,
even in this nameless void,
I wanted to name myself.



War Pie
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A Matter of Life and Death

By Musimbi Kanyoro

I became an activist for women by reading Bible stories. I found courage in the Old Testament witness of the daughters of Zelophehad, who made a fearless plea for a woman's right to property and justice. I found hope in the good news of the New Testament. I realized Christian faith is built on hope.

The church need to get in touch with that hope and courage right now for the sake of women everywhere. Millions of lives are at stake.

I currently work in women's health, the place where I try to emulate my ancient Hebrew sisters by taking the courage to ask for justice for women. Reproductive health problems are the leading cause of death for women of reproductive age in developing countries. Women are dying because of silence on this subject. The world's lack of solidarity with women and the persistence of power dynamics – not a lack of medical solutions – determine which women live and which women die. The number of women globally who die from pregnancy-related causes each year is more than 500,000, while more than 300 million women live with illnesses due to pregnancy or childbirth. A staggering 99 percent of maternal deaths occur in developing countries.

Socioeconomic disparity determines who lives and dies. Consider that the lifetime risk of death from pregnancy-related causes in Canada is around one in 11,000, while in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone the number is one in eight. Even within wealthy countries, the inequities are revealing. According to the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Canada's average maternal mortality masks big regional variations; the reality for women in some rural and remote areas, particularly aboriginal communities, is disturbing. In the U.S., black women continue to be the most affected because of health disparities.

Survival rates for pregnant women depend largely upon the distance and time a woman must travel to reach skilled emergency medical care. Ac-

cording to the United Nations, factors increasing the high risk of maternal death can be blamed on delays in seeking care – for example, when a women must get permission from male family members to travel – as well as delays in reaching an emergency care facility because of a lack of transportation, or delays in receiving care when facilities lack sufficient staff, equipment, and affordability. Maternal mortal-

Each year that a girl stays in school makes her less likely to marry early and more likely to plan for her children.

ity rates could be drastically reduced by improving women's access to comprehensive reproductive health services and health education.

These statistics reflect gross inequities between rich and poor. For the women affected, they also represent a serious infringement of basic human rights, including the right to the highest attainable standard of health services and information. And they mask a much wider societal impact. More than a million children are left motherless every year. Newborns whose mothers die from these preventable deaths are three-to-ten times more likely to die before the age of two than those whose mothers survive. Orphaned girls often are pulled out of school to fill the role of caregiver for other family members. This is why UNICEF refers to the "double dividend" of gender equality, one that benefits women and children both – and, indeed, society at large.

Imagine living in a country like Malawi, in which you share your doctor with 50,000 others. People in thirty-six countries in Africa live a similarly grim reality, says the World Health Organization. Africa faces a shortage of 800,000 doctors and nurses, and currently trains only between 10-30 percent of the skilled health workers that are needed. With aging populations, industrialized countries too are suffering a shortfall while the demand for health services is on the rise, a trend that drives up demand for trained hospital and clinic staff. Africa loses 20,000 trained health professionals every year to migration – this on a continent that already manages 25 percent of the global burden of disease with only 3 percent of the global health workforce.¹

The result of this ruinous migration is that wealthy countries reap a benefit while poorer countries that helped finance education and professional training lose a return on their investment. But there

Imagine living in a country like Malawi, in which you share your doctor with 50,000 others. People in thirty-six countries in Africa live a similarly grim reality.

are deeper social impacts in many countries, where the net loss of health workers can hasten the near-collapse of already fragile health systems.

My conscience is constantly on edge as I encounter the misery and death of women because of their reproductive capabilities. An estimated 200 million women worldwide want access to modern contraceptives but cannot get them, leading to 80 million unintended pregnancies each year. Nearly 350,000 women die each year because their pregnancies are too soon, too close together, or too many, or happen in unsafe conditions. One in five of these deaths are related to unsafe abortion.

Girls continue to lack educational access, especially at the secondary level, yet each year that a girl stays in school makes her less likely to marry early and more likely to plan for and space her children, use family planning, and get adequate medical care during and after pregnancy. Providing greater educational and economic opportunity to women is fundamental to improving their ability to make choices about their own fertility.

Meeting Ana

These are not just statistics. Real people exist behind them. I encountered Ana, who was feeding her six hungry children with dirty water and a little coffee powder because she could not afford anything else. I visited Ana in a poor slum in the vast

city of Manila. She is 30 years old and has had nine pregnancies with spacing of no more than a year. She could hardly walk – overcome by exhaustion, hunger, and illness. She looks older than her age. Ana cannot space her children or limit them because the Church does not allow her to use contraceptives. She may die and her children too are vulnerable. She indeed already lost three children before their first birthdays.

There are millions of women like Ana all over the world. Why are they invisible to the church and the media? Why are they simply invisible?

Although the problems are daunting, the elements of a human rights response to health issues are straightforward, and the potential for positive change is enormous. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “every individual and organ of society ... shall strive ... to promote respect for these rights ... and by progressive measures ... secure their universal and effective recognition and observance.”

Fulfillment of human rights – and justice for women – depends upon the actions of individuals and communities, the private sector, international organizations and religious leaders, not just governments. Human rights – including women’s human rights – are everyone’s responsibility. What if religions cared about justice for women? What if the churches could care?

Musimbi Kanyoro is director of the Population Program of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation in Los Altos, CA. The Population Program focuses on reproductive health and the integration of those services with critical global health issues like HIV/AIDS. From 1998-2007, she was general secretary of the World YWCA, an umbrella organization for national YWCAs in 125 countries, with an outreach to 25 million women and girls and their families in 3,000 communities. She has also worked for the Lutheran World Federation, and is a former circle coordinator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

Notes

1. The UN’s Millennium Development Goals pledge to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and develop a global partnership for development. With only four years remaining before the 2015 target date, many countries are still far from meeting these goals; the goal of maternal health is showing the least progress. Universal access to reproductive health is a key to achieving the MDGs because it aims not only to reduce maternal death but also improve reproductive health and quality of life for women before they become mothers and throughout adulthood.

Acompañamiento: A Walk Toward Dignity for All

By M.T. Dávila

Recently I gave a presentation on immigration and justice in New Hampshire. The evening began with the video One Border/One Body: Immigration and the Eucharist, by the Rev. Dan Groody. The film documents the yearly Eucharist that takes place on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, with the readings, petitions, the sign of peace, and Communion occurring across a chain link fence.

Footage includes a theological discussion of the often deadly journey many immigrants travel in order to get into the U.S. Following this powerful video, I asked the audience to ponder a question: what would make *you* leave everything and everyone you know and love, risk everything you are, to get to another country? People offered familiar answers – escaping domestic or political violence, seeking

How do we move from fear to neighborliness in our national debates and daily lives?

employment in order to support one's family, finding better health care for a sick child or better educational opportunities.

Threat of the "Other"

A gentleman in the room raised an objection, complaining about how much "free stuff" immigrants receive after entering this country without the proper documentation. Interestingly, no one had mentioned the word "free." Not one person had said that immigrant access to better resources in this country should be free. This person was operating on an approach to "the other," the non-citizen, from a perspective of scarcity of resources and threat to his own security rather than from a perspective of abundance, mutual care, and Christian imagination.

How do we move from fear to neighborliness in our national debates and daily lives? How can we

faithfully engage the command of love of neighbor in light of our public policies, including the debate and practices around immigration? There is much we can learn from recent theologies birthed out of human pain, sweat and hope – the emergence of Latino/a and *mujerista* theologies, which offer criteria to help churches bridge this terrifying gap in the way we perceive the immigrant and transform a national discourse on immigration reform notable for its lack of imagination and a failure to transcend a threat mentality.

Latino/a and *mujerista*¹ theologies invite the faithful struggling with this and other social issues in the public square to consider how our faith demands a walking with, an *acompañamiento*, that leads us to make or advocate for policy decisions from the perspective of the everyday experience of the other. A new empathy for actual life in the borderlands and a grasp of *mestizaje* – a basic element of Latino/a and *mujerista* theologies – can awaken our awareness to the truth that a migrant identity, in fact, embodies the human condition shared by all – especially Christians sojourning between the already and the not yet of Christian hope.

Grounded in the preferential option for the poor, Latino/a theologies take their cue from *lo cotidiano*, the "dailiness" or daily struggle of life. *Lo cotidiano* regards life as a combination of both the extraordinary (births, marriages, death, love) and the ordinary (seeking daily nourishment, a conversation around a kitchen table, the visit of a friend, the struggle to pay

the heating bill). In *lo cotidiano* we find revealed to us human desire, hope, longing, suffering, oppression, joy, celebration, faith. It is the place where the divine comes to our encounter, the only place where divine reality is truly in touch with us as creatures, in the messiness of life. For *mujerista* theologies, *lo cotidiano* is especially identified with the particular sufferings and joys of the daily lives of Latinas in the U.S, who are often doubly or triply oppressed by the fact that they are women, eking out an existence, sometimes in hard manual labor, and particularly vulnerable if they are other-documented.

Central to being attentive to *lo cotidiano* is the need for an accurate read on that daily reality, with clear data about the conditions that dictate the life of the poor, the life of women, the life of children, the elderly, natives, the environment. *Lo cotidiano* acknowledges that the social sciences as well as the witness of personal experiences have much to contribute to the theological enterprise. Hope is perennially the stuff of grand theories of liberation and salvation. But in *lo cotidiano* hope becomes a more real and concrete expression of liberation – a concrete act of friendship and hospitality, the prospect of a life lived with dignity and without violence, public acknowledgment and celebration that each culture counts as a blessed contribution to the human family.²

Shared Humanity, Vulnerability

We are familiar with the accompaniment that takes place during wakes or when a loved one is experiencing particular hardship. *Acompañamiento* suggests a richer meaning that opens the door to faith transformation or conversion. It means both a walking with *and* a bearing with the poor – whoever these may be, near or far, their struggles for a life with *dignidad*, dignity. *Acompañamiento* entails a double recognition, first, that our neighbor's humanity is under threat because of injustice and suffering, and, second, that the dignity of all (poor and non-poor) must be upheld. A practice of *acompañamiento* does not differentiate between legal status or gender, geographical proximity or nationality. It practices solidarity that goes beyond financial contributions, extending to friendship, praying and worshipping together, sharing a meal, lobbying together for more humane policies, becoming a sanctuary church. This practice can include taking on some of the vulnerability of those who face physical and political risk. At the heart of *acompañamiento* is the understanding that life lived in mutual relationships of care is necessary to uphold the dignity of all. For Latino/a and *mujerista* theologies, *dignidad* challenges any

atomistic or individualistic understanding of the person or human rights. As a human family we are people living in community, community defined beyond the legal limits of borders, political identities, or religious practices.³

Giving further urgency to these theologies is the concept of *mestizaje*, a term of remembrance and a call to political awareness and engagement. For a number of us, we do not have to travel too far into the past to discover how *mestizaje* operated in the production of our own humanity. My own family line traces back to a woman forcibly brought to the Caribbean from Africa only four generations ago. Derived from the word for the mix of cultures,

There is much we can learn from recent theologies birthed out of human pain, sweat, and hope – the emergence of Latino/a and *mujerista* theologies.

racess, and ethnicities that engender the Latino or Hispanic, *mestizaje* is used often as both a reminder of our past histories of violence, *conquista*, slavery, and oppression, as well as the celebration of the resilience and diversity of the Latino people. Though some have historically tried to blur or overlook the personal stories of *mestizaje*, I consider its recovery essential to a full understanding of our humanity. In my case, I've chosen to honor this by naming one of my daughters Petra, a name that in most Spanish-speaking Caribbean circles is associated with the African legacy of our ethnicity, slavery, and servitude.

Like *lo cotidiano*, *mestizaje* presses us to reflect honestly on our shared histories with other groups sometimes considered radically other, leading to the understanding that in fact all of us share a complex mix of characteristics – some by choice, others by force – that should ground us in a common and shared destiny. Through *mestizaje*, Latino/a and *mujerista* theologies examine both the “never again” of the kind of violent conquest that originated the Latino people – that tendency of empires to extend their military power and economic reach as far as possible without concern for native peoples or imported slave labor – as well as the celebration that the human spirit borne of such violence carries within the seed of peace and the flower of justice. Most importantly, *mestizaje* can be applied to everyone's sojourner identity – our shared migrant condition on earth, our universal quest for life.

Combined with the social teaching of our religious traditions and the best of civil society, the insights of Latino/a and *mujerista* theologies invite

us to look at particularly hard questions from the practical perspectives of *lo cotidiano*, *acompañamiento*, *dignidad*, and *mestizaje*. When we come to understand our humanity as intimately tied to the quest for life of all people on the move, especially the migrant, our own unsustainable practices of consumption, discrimination, and participation in a culture of hate dominated by perspectives of scarcity and threat, come into stark relief. It is here that the

Vulnerability is part of all our lives. In the end, we must face the fact that our own daily reality – our *lo cotidiano* – also includes threat and scarcity.

tools offered by Latino/a and *mujerista* theologies provide rich resources to churches. They encourage taking stock of one's human condition in light of the suffering of others, to consider social transformation and policy decisions that were not considered possible prior to encountering these ideas, to overcome the inhuman determinism that resigns us to accept the brokenness of the human family as an accident of birth.

Regarding the stalemate and struggle of our current immigration debate, we may differ greatly on the best strategies to protect our borders and uphold national identity, yet surely we can agree that the daily suffering and dying on the border – either in desert crossings, attacks by drug gangs, violation of women's *dignidad* – need to be addressed by people of faith. Once we subscribe to a practice of *acompañamiento*, that “illegal” who crosses the border and who so many perceive as trying to take advantage of the public services of our country now becomes a real human being, someone whose journey and quest for life that everyone shares. At this point of contact, mutual care, solidarity, shared destiny – *mestizaje* – I cannot but look at immigration reform and other public policies from a perspective of abundance, imagination, and hope.

Vulnerability is part of all our lives. In the end, we must face the fact that our own daily reality – our *lo cotidiano* – also includes threat and scarcity. We lose our jobs, we have mediocre health insurance, our schools are overextended and underfunded. And yet the Christian message challenges us to look at the existential threats and vulnerabilities that mark our existence with the imagination and hope characteristic of Jesus Christ. I believe that the insights of Latino/a and *mujerista* theology challenge us to shift how we view the shared vulnerability of the

human family, shift the kaleidoscopic lens through which we come to understand daily experience and truth-telling, so that we are propelled to an imaginative approach to our most vexing questions of life in community, life with *dignidad*, lived in *acompañamiento*.

M.T. Dávila is a Roman Catholic laywoman in Malden, MA, where she is assistant professor of Christian ethics at Andover Newton Theological School. She teaches on issues of race and immigration, class, consumerism, and the environment, the ethics of the use of force, and the social teaching of the Christian churches.

Notes

- 1 The body of work commonly known as *mujerista* includes many Latina thinkers that approach theological and ethical questions from the perspective of the experience of Latina women. While privileging justice and the option for the poor, *Mujerista* theology tries to perceive reality from a particular experience of suffering and hope, *lucha* (or struggle) and joy in life. Ada María Isasi-Díaz coined the term in her *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Orbis, 1999). However, many Latina thinkers also use the *mujerista* label to describe their approach to doing theology grounded in the concrete experiences of suffering and joy of the Latino people, especially of women.
- 2 Ada María Isasi Díaz and Roberto Goizueta, among other Latino/a scholars, develop the theological impact of *lo cotidiano* in their work. See Ada María Isasi Díaz, *En la Lucha/In the Struggle: Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (Fortress, 1999); and Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Orbis, 1999).
- 3 Two volumes that develop the relational dimensions of Latino/a anthropology include Miguel Díaz, *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives* (Orbis, 2001); Michelle González, *Created in God's Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology* (Orbis, 2007).



Moved to Tears, Moved to Action

By Jacqueline Ogega

Women in labor walking for miles to find a clinic ... women giving birth by the roadside ... women leaking urine 24 hours a day because of fistula, the result of maternal injuries, sexual violence, or both ... pregnant women bedridden with HIV/AIDS infections ... pregnant women with no access to pre-natal and ante-natal care ... girls raped and forcefully impregnated.

These grotesque images of human suffering come from real life: they are testimonies of cases of maternal trauma and fistula made by women from Virika, Uganda, and Mwanza, Tanzania, both rural poor settings, during a recent consultation sponsored by Religions for Peace, in collaboration with the United Nations Foundation. Meeting in New York City, the consultation was one in a series of initiatives to stir action against maternal deaths and fistula.

As people of faith, are we outraged enough about women's suffering to take action? Are we alarmed enough by the inhumane conditions and vulnerabilities that so many women face, and the need for proper care for giving life? To be sure, the conference participants who heard the testimonies from Tanzania and Uganda that day were moved to tears, with cries of "What can we do to help?" Someone donated a Flip camera to Holy Family Virika Hospital in Uganda to capture the stories of women. Women of faith from Long Island City, N.Y. – mobilizing from churches, temples, mosques, and gurdwaras – raised \$6,000 within weeks for medical needs. Other spontaneous responses flowed forth.

A Track Record of Crisis-Response

I am always astonished and inspired at how quickly women of faith organize for action. My current work at Religions for Peace focuses on building such women-of-faith networks, whether in small villages or across nations. The Religions for Peace Global Women of Faith Network has helped network more than 1,000 religious women's organizations inter-

nationally for more than ten years and witnessed their leadership in resolving conflict.

The goal of the networks is to mobilize women of faith around issues of peace. And I mean peace in the broadest terms: not just the absence of war, but living honorably, dying in peace, and not starving. The networks endeavor to transform violent conflict, reduce poverty, promote just and harmonious societies, and protect the earth. They protect children's well-being. They sponsor training, counseling, and informal microcredit initiatives. They provide support for HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children. They do home-based care for the chronically ill.

Sadly, though, the work of women of faith is customarily ignored. Politically they are often invisible. Financially they are unsupported or under-supported. They are dismissed as "informal prayer" networks and groups. In many cases they raise their own funds, since it is difficult to access official funding and resources. Yet their work is critical. They take on pivotal tasks far beyond care-giving gendered roles – fundraising, political civic engagement, even courageous peacemaking in dangerous situations of intractable conflicts.

In April 1997, at the brutal height of the civil war in Sierra Leone that had lasted two decades, women of faith played a critical role in mediating peace. Villages were ravaged, child soldiers were recruited openly for war, and civilians were casually mutilated or murdered by warring parties. Women met with fighters from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)

and successfully convinced rebel leaders to release fifty child soldiers. These women, members of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone (IRC SL), an affiliate of Religions for Peace, put their country first, standing up for peace.

Let us applaud these achievements. At the same time, I have come to value the need to remain terribly troubled. In the twenty-first century, why do we still tolerate woeful conditions that allow a woman to die while giving life? How can we bear it that a mere adolescent child, already a mother, is rotting away with fistula and vaginal injury? The harsh truth

The harsh truth is, maternal health is not yet everyone's business. Maternal health is considered "women's business" only, and not a peace-and-security imperative.

is, maternal health is not yet everyone's business. Sadly, maternal health is considered "women's business" only, and not a peace-and-security imperative. The resources – human, material, financial – are not dedicated to make sure that every woman gives birth in safety, or that every woman and girl is free from violence, or that every child is born safely and raised in a secure environment. Instead, habitual war expenditure ensures the spread of lethal armies and technologies that maim and destroy.

We face a persistent mental habit and political prejudice: the world too often looks at women as victims of conflict rather than as agents of conflict resolution. Women are generally undervalued in peacemaking, or not valued at all. They are marginalized or excluded from the political process. They could shed light on policies involving peacemaking work they are already doing, but there is a lack of confidence to join or engage. Confidence must be built. Their space must be claimed.

Prayers of Ultimate Peace

Cannot the religious voice grow louder in defense of maternal health and the role of women in peacemaking? Cannot the religious voice advocate a redirection of war budgets to the nurturing of life? Cannot faith-based actions rally around the promise of dignity and well-being of women and children, as warranted in religious teachings? Faith communities cannot leave modern threats to peace, including maternal health, mostly in the hands only of women who are survivors themselves or serve as politically marginalized social workers, nurses, volunteers, counsellors, or caregivers of the afflicted.

Alas, there are no quick solutions to these problems rooted in gender inequality. Women of faith cannot afford to remain apolitical or do the work by themselves. They must forge partnerships with governments, civil society, academic institutions, and with individuals dedicated to equality and human rights. Gender lenses have to be applied to overcome this "invisibility."

Our faith must stir us to go where the suffering is happening. All people of faith – men, women, youth – must become much more deeply troubled about the causes of gender discrimination and impoverishment embedded in systems, structures, and processes. In faith, we can work to transform inequality. We can alter political decisions about how to spend foreign and domestic budgets. We can empower survivors to make known their own solutions. We can raise the faith-based voices, break the silences, and reject any misuses of religion that justify such human suffering.

May the truth move us to tears and, more deeply, mobilize us to take action and embody the vision common to all the religions – the prayer of ultimate peace, where people endeavor to live in harmony, and the well-being of each person is related to the well-being of all.¹

Jacqueline Moturi Ogega is Director of the Women's Program at the World Conference of Religions for Peace-International, based in New York City. Previously, she served as the African Women's Project Director at Religions for Peace in Africa, where she established the African Women of Faith Network to enhance multi-religious cooperation in Africa. Born in Kenya, she has been a lecturer in Gender and Development Studies at the University of Nairobi and National Coordinator of the Gender and Development Program of Caritas in Kenya.

Notes

- 1 Religions for Peace expounds notions of peace and the leadership of women of faith in various publications, including: *Faith Endures: Eliminating Fistula, Securing Maternal Health*; *A Guide for Building Women of Faith Networks*; *Restoring Dignity: A Toolkit for Religious Communities to End Violence Against Women*; *Strategic Plan: Different Faiths, Common Action*; and *A Woman's Place: Religious Women as Public Actors*. See www.religionsforpeace.org.



Women of the Desert
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What's in a Word?

By Shannon Clarkson

Long before there was inclusive language worship, long even before women in this country won the right to vote, linguists were exposing the sexist grammatical infrastructure that stood in the way of progress for women in church and society.

The unfolding drama of the inclusive language debate in church life reveals what those early linguists knew: people have deep emotional commitments to familiar language, and change is slow and painful. Grammar always matters in sexual politics.

In 1908, Charlotte Carmichael Stopes wrote a treatise on the use of “man” in British law and its deleterious effect on women’s freedom. American anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons in 1913 discussed the linguistic double standard that assumes the superiority of “man” as a pronoun for both men and women.

Their findings detailed pivotal grammatical dictates in gender enforcement stretching back centuries. In England in 1560, prescriptive grammarian Thomas Wilson had declared that the “natural”

The furor even brought death threats to committee members, reminding everyone again of the deeply embedded claims that language makes in our emotional lives.

order ought to be observed in language. He illustrated: the “good man of the house should precede the woman, as the better Horse should precede the graye mare.” Grammarian Josua Poole in 1646 follows suit by declaring the masculine gender as more worthy than the feminine. The rule was cast in stone in 1850: an act of Parliament legally replaced “he or she” with “he.”

The work of feminist linguists in the twentieth century further disclosed how our grammar rules are

as susceptible to personal bias as any other facet of society. But public awareness did not come quickly. An average of one article per year on the phenomenon of exclusively male language was published until the 1970s, when eighty-one appeared in the first three years, followed by a staggering 1,000 items in the ensuing ten years, as listed in the bibliography in the 1983 book *Language, Gender, and Society*.

Unfortunately, many of those making the case for inclusive language in the religious sphere were unaware of the linguistic research that had been tracking the debate for decades.

The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible, published in 1976 and conceived by the National Council of Churches’ Task Force on Sexism in the Bible, was one of the earliest attempts to introduce inclusive language issues within the church in a format accessible to local congregational groups. One recommendation was that the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible translation committee, constituted in 1980, be alert to linguistic sexism in the texts and produce as inclusive a translation as possible. The NCC task force also asked that more women be added to the NRSV translation team.

Praise and Scorn

A second recommendation led to the production of *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary* in three volumes for use in the churches. *Year A* appeared in 1983, and was greeted with both praise and scorn. The NCC received more than 10,000 letters of disapproval. The furor even brought death threats to committee members, reminding everyone again of the deeply embedded claims that language makes in our emo-

tional lives. Nevertheless, the project continued. A revised edition of *Year A* in 1986 broadened the categories for attention, including language about persons with disabilities.

By 1991, meanwhile, the NRSV Bible translation itself was published. The NCC's Bible Translation and Utilization Committee braced for a backlash reminiscent of the uproar following the publication of the first RSV in 1952, when one irate pastor burned his copy with a blowtorch and sent the ashes to the NCC's New York offices. This time, the uproar never came. The reason may be this: even though feminine pronouns and nouns representing human beings were added for inclusivity and clarity of meaning, language for God was rarely altered in the NRSV.

Such breakthroughs seem to represent real steps forward, but we have to wonder how meaningful the progress has been in the culture's emotional, moral habits. Some forty years ago, in the early days of the inclusive-language movement, advocates assumed that factual information about patriarchal distortions would carry the day and persuade hearts and minds to give up old biases. If people understood that our language reflected a clear patriarchal bias we could change that bias, correct?

What the Hearer Hears

Yet sociolinguists have long contended that our grammar and vocabulary are complicit in shaping deeply our understanding of the world. Even so, creating a more inclusive society by simply and only changing the language is unfortunately never possible. The mere act of changing one's language so that it is "politically correct" does not mean that one's thoughts about sexism or racism have changed. Yet we can reasonably hope for a net gain by and by. Not everyone changes; some do. And although a person may not be as inclusive as her or his language would indicate, the *hearer* is another part of the linguistic equation: even if the heart of the speaker remains unchanged, the listeners still feel included.¹

In the last twenty years, new hymnals from mainline denominations have addressed features of inclusive language other than human gender questions. The first hymn in the revised *United Methodist Hymnal* of 1989, "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," has an asterisk on the sixth verse noting that it may be omitted. The suspect lines include "Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ." The fourth hymn in that volume, "Come, Thou Almighty King," appears as "Come Now, Almighty God" in the 1995 *New Century Hymnal* of the United Church of Christ.

Attention to inclusive language is especially significant, and especially contentious, in the world of worship. Last fall at YDS, several people reportedly stayed away from the regular weekday worship on the morning that featured the singing of Bobby McFerrin's Gregorian chant-like version of the Twenty-third Psalm, which uses female pronouns for God. Many of us have been singing versions of that Psalm

Language is always changing. So is our knowledge of God. Using words that demean others or limit God limits and demeans us all.

all our lives using male pronouns; it seems not to matter that male pronouns are no more accurate an interpretation of the nature of God than female pronouns.

Endeavoring still to encourage its member communions to take a fresh look at the language used both in and out of worship, the NCC's Justice for Women Working Group recently started a series of national dialogues on expansive language for the twenty-first century. The dialogues ask participants to focus on two questions: 1) How does our language for God, one another, and our world move us toward God's justice? And 2) What new or other imagery is there to help us connect with God? The aim is to sensitize churches to think of God and the people of God in more expansive terms and metaphors.

We've seen incredible cultural changes in the last generation: cell phones, internet, gay marriage in five states and the District of Columbia. Inclusive language in society has made inroads, too. We now have flight attendants, both male and female. At the Kentucky Derby people now sing "'Tis summer the *people* are gay," rather than Stephen Foster's original lyrics, *darkies*. Little girls no longer think it's impossible to grow up to be a minister.

My Heart Sings

My heart sang when I read, in the preface of the new Common English Bible translation, "The women and men who participated in the creation of the CEB hope that those who read and study it will find the translation to be an accurate, clear, and inspiring version of Christian scripture." The CEB New Testament was published in 2010; this year the entire Bible with Apocrypha will follow. That 20 percent of the translators were women is at least a small step forward. That the project included 115 scholars from twenty-two faith traditions, yet was able to translate

ben'adam and *huios tou anthropou* as “human being” instead of “son of man” indicates that serious attention continues to be paid to gender issues. Moving beyond the NRSV, the CEB renders the “Son of Man” of Matthew 25 and elsewhere in the New Testament as the “Human One.”

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” declares John’s Gospel. Language is always changing; so is our knowledge of God. Holding fast to a particular grammatical construction or to one image of God is to misunderstand the nature of both. Using words that demean others or limit God limits and demeans us all. By honoring the words we speak and write, we honor the Word.

Shannon Clarkson '78 M.Div. was instrumental in the production of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, serving on the Bible Translation and Utilization Committee at the National Council of Churches from 1986-96, and as committee chair from 1992-96. She is co-editor of two books, Dictionary of Feminist Theologies (Westminster John Knox, 2004) and Letty Russell's Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference (Westminster John Knox, 2009). Ordained in the United Church of Christ, she is on the YDS adjunct faculty.

Notes

- 1 Though some will argue that *man*, *men*, and *mankind* still function as generic and gender-neutral nouns, the phrase in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” we know was false from the beginning. History proves that two Amendments were required to ensure that people of color (Thirteenth) and women (Nineteenth) were also meant to share in that equality. The animated-film cartoon *Included Out*, popular in churches in the 1970s, illustrated the confusion generated by the hymn “Rise Up, O Men of God.” In the film, a woman new to the English language is repeatedly reassured during the worship service that she is included in the hymn despite the masculine terminology. Moments later we see her rebuffed as she tries to enter a Men’s Room!

The National Council of Churches initiative “Words Matter” hopes to reverse a notable recent decline in the use of gender-inclusive language in church life.

The Words Matter project aims to spark renewed alertness in local congregations to the power of faith language to offend and hurt and to heal and be hospitable to others.

Despite decades of official efforts to encourage inclusive language about God and people, many churchgoers still experience offense at language that sounds prejudicial or unwelcoming.

A downloadable Words Matter conversation guide for small groups and congregational use (see www.wordsmatter.org) encourages grassroots dialogue and “expansive” language that is sensitive to gender, ethnicity, and disabilities too.

The document was inspired by an NCC gathering in Chicago last August, when participants of different viewpoints shared stories of the impact of Biblical and God-language on their own faith journeys.

The Words Matter conversation guide outlines one-session workshops, small-group conversations, and other strategies to enhance empathy across ideological or cultural divides

The manual includes statements from participants of the August dialogue. Here’s a sample:

- “What does it mean that this conversation goes forward? More and more, I think the church struggles to remain relevant. When we argue about such things as a Spirit’s gender, we expose ourselves to being dogmatic, limited, and chauvinistic. When we call the European manner of worship and liturgy ‘traditional’ and label anything else as alternative or contextual, we expose our Euro-centrism. What does it mean to me personally that we are doing this consultation? It means that others can be liberated, affirmed, and given hope. At least, that is my hope.”

- “(Studying it in seminary) Hebrew intimidated me. But then, one day, I experienced an explosion in my consciousness when I was doing word analysis of YHWH. I understood the word to be in the hiphil form, and I interpreted the name into ‘I will be whoever I will be.’ Some may be bothered by the nuance of indefiniteness in this name, but, for me, it was most liberating. I could LOVE God who refused to be defined by human language that is a product of patriarchal culture. It was exhilarating to meet this God whose name was YHWH. ... My God is a verb, ever evolving, transgressing all human categories.”

- “Words can be so easily misinterpreted, so subjectively defined, so difficult to understand in all their complexity, historical contexts, original languages, and on and on ... but over time my frustration has been balanced by the beauty and adventure of God using words to communicate with us. Suddenly faith is not a cut-and-dry dogmatism but a dynamic place of imagination and hope.”

— Ray Waddle

Skin Deep

By Kat Banakis

I am in seventh grade at a party, leaning against a wall with two friends, a girl and a boy. In elementary school, the boy used to wear Metallica t-shirts because his (absentee) father was a fan of the band. It is a hanging out party – the kind where parents put out chips and salsa, go into their room with a video and allow the youth social jungle to happen as it will. We are bored.

I look over to a couple teasing one another on the couch across the living room and ask the boy I'm sitting with, "How come guys don't like me?" Poor kid. He's on the spot. He can't win in this situation.

How could it be that I was created in the image of an indescribably incredible God and yet perceived myself as really rather dumpy?

He thinks for a moment and says earnestly, "Guys don't look past your outside to see that you're really nice underneath."

His words embed in me and become their own sort of truth: I'm not attractive on the outside. I'll be lucky if some guy is ever duped into seeing past my frumpy, dragon exterior.

Once I decided that I wasn't attractive, any compliment about my looks obviously had to have a different explanation. My parents regularly told me that I was beautiful. I thanked them but thought, *You have to say that. I'm your daughter.* After taking a college psych class my internal monologue matured: *The cognitive dissonance would be too great if the self didn't think I was wonderful when it was investing all available resources in me.*

I dated, I had boyfriends, but that never really altered my self-perception. Thus I attributed any compliment from a boyfriend to be part of what he had to do in his role, not as a legitimate statement from an objective third party.

My self-perceived plainness became a point of pride. Physical beauty was shallow, fleeting, and almost always synthetic. Focusing on physical beauty led to a middle-aged catastrophe – the prospect of being helplessly without savings, property, marketable skills, or even a driver's license because your husband has decided to leave you for a younger model.

This pride was complicated by my faith. Real Christian women, I thought, were comfortable with themselves and didn't adorn. I took satisfaction in being counter-cultural, foregoing things like fashion, make-up, and all forms of enhancements.

Still, I felt pretty crummy.

Blessed Assurance

I could blame society, I suppose, as if popular culture's ideal of female perfection were crafted by an evil society machine. Or I could say that this creation of the unattainable female ideal is the result of collective human sin, a byproduct of what happens when humanity yields to impulses that demean and exploit and do violence to people. But I'm not convinced that blaming anonymous outside forces or regarding media, advertising, or the visual arts as code for collective evil is all too helpful. I need practical ways to face the day with my real face, and cultural theodicy can quickly become a vortex of blame.

What I wanted was to feel good about myself within this world and its communities, not in spite of or in opposition to this world. I particularly want-

ed to feel better about myself because I was experiencing some serious cognitive dissonance when I tried to read the beginning of Genesis, where God creates humanity in God's own image.

How could it be that I was created in the image of an indescribably incredible God and yet perceived myself as really rather dumpy? How could the image of God (me) be so different than what I believed God to be like?

My (Christian) counselor asked me what it would be like to covenant with myself not to allow the long-ago comments in seventh grade to dictate my self-perception now?

A novel concept. "Nice?" I ventured. That's like asking what it would feel like to be a Parisian rock star: I don't know.

So I spent a week looking at attractive people at work and on the street and in traffic and in church and in the locker room at the gym. What made them physically beautiful? What was the common factor in people that drew others to them? What made me want to watch them?

By the end of the week, I could draw a few conclusions: Some were big, others small. Some had obvious confidence, others held back. But what the beautiful people have in common is, as it turns out, what they have in common with the rest of us: they, we, live. We have breath. We are the quick, not the dead. We are alive.

The Quick and the Dead

I have never seen a beautiful corpse. Sometimes people who are sleeping can be beautiful in a vulnerable way. But not corpses. My grandmother's body lying in the casket was a good-looking mannequin with a great make-up job and wardrobe team. That's part of why I appreciate open casket ceremonies – to confirm that the person we knew is really gone. The summer I trained as an ER chaplain, a young boy drowned in Long Island Sound. I held the metal table steady while his mother climbed on top of the child on all fours and tried to pull the mortuary plugs out of his nostrils and throat. Acrid salt water gurgled back out. She shook his small body, as if she could shock him back to breathing. Still straddling him she glared at me and demanded, "Where is he?" Gone (to where we speak only in prayer with the saints).

I cannot grasp what it would be like to feel pretty all the time. But I do know what it's like to feel so very alive that I forget to think about how I look at all – neither good nor bad, just alive. I am alive when I'm problem-solving with colleagues in a strategy session and we're all on deadline. I can get lost in



Noelle York-Simmons '03 M.Div. is senior associate rector at All Saints Episcopal Church in Atlanta. With a background in photography, she is poised to embark on a Lilly Endowment-funded summer sabbatical project: she plans to photograph people's hands taking communion. A mother of two, she is also a runner: in July she

will enter the San Francisco marathon.

Gifts and Callings

While I understand the "stained-glass ceiling," the limits that women face in church leadership, I don't identify myself as a "woman priest." I'm just a priest. I don't perceive my gender as a special gift or calling, because I've never known a church without female leadership. I grew up with the gift of a family and a church that opened to me a limitless world. I didn't know until college that the Episcopal Church didn't always have women priests! I recognize I'm able to follow this vocation because of the incredibly powerful work that women did before me, women who had to wage nasty battles just to prove themselves as human beings. I am deeply grateful for their work and grateful that because of that work, it is not necessary for me to prove myself as worthy despite my gender.

The Hands of Christ

Serving the Eucharist, it's a privilege to me to put the body of Christ in people's hands. I love that moment. And over the years I've gotten to know people's hands – bejeweled hands, or arthritic hands, or scarred. I think about how people after communion leave the church and become the hands of Christ in the world. I wanted to explore that more fully. So, with my family, I'll visit Episcopal parishes across the Southeast, take pictures, hear people's stories, learn what they do with the "hands of Christ" in their daily lives.

Terrifying, Wonderful

I love to preach. I love the practice of crafting a sermon, of discovering my own theology as I write. The wordsmithing that comes along with writing a palatable sermon is a delicious challenge. The words I've wrestled with on the page take on an even greater weight when they leave my mouth. It is terrifying and wonderful every time.

Self-care

The church is a holy, sustaining, and life-giving place, but for clergy it can also be exhausting and frustrating even amidst the blessings. Having children has really driven home my seminary-acquired lessons about self-care. If I do not take care of myself, no one else will; I need to be well not only for my parish, but for my family. Since becoming a mother, I have found it even more important to identify my boundaries and know when they are fluid and when they are impermeable.

a piece of music and or in friends' woes and joys. Alive is running in an aerobic trance so deep that only later do I realize where I've been and what my muscles just did.

I used to think that moments of forgetting my insecurities were mere escape, but I'm beginning to think that these moments are actually true and accurate in the face of the absolute beauty of being made in the image of God.

A few weeks ago, I heard Matthew 5 again, as if for the first time, the part where Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world." There's no contingency, no conditions or technicalities, no if-then for what we have to do to be God's enriching and enlightening force in the world. All we must do is live. And I remembered good old Karl Barth's contention that the essence of God is live action and St. Irenaeus of Lyon's statement that the glory of God is the human person fully alive.

That I can do. If that's imitatio Dei, that I can be. I can live. Life – the gift, the pulse – is the root and image and engine of beauty, everyone's beauty, and that's what marks the image of God upon us.

I'm not sure that I can envision breaking out into "I Feel Pretty" with a Broadway Puerto Rican backup

Life – the gift, the pulse – is the root and image and engine of beauty, everyone's beauty, and that's what marks the image of God upon us.

chorus for the rest of my days, but I can envision a future of hunting for fireflies with the smell of Queen Anne's Lace hanging in the humidity, and drinking cups and cups of tea when life falls apart a bit, and protesting the sins that plague our world, and singing even when I'm too old to control the warble in my vocal chords.

I can live into that divine image. It's beautiful, really.

Kat Banakis '09 M.Div is a candidate for holy orders in the Episcopal Church. She works in fundraising consulting for Grenzebach Glier and Associates and serves at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Park Ridge, IL. She is completing a book of theology for Generation X/Y adults, from which this essay was adapted.

"SCIENTISTS FIND UNIVERSE AWASH IN TINY DIAMONDS"*

By Mayne Ellis

But haven't we always known?
the shimmer of trees, the shaking of flames
every cloud lined with something
clean water sings
right to the belly
scouring us with its purity
it too is awash with diamonds

"so small that trillions could rest
on the head of a pin"

It is not unwise then to say
that the air is hung close with diamonds
that we breathe diamond
our lungs hoarding, exchanging
our blood sowing them rich and thick
along every course it takes
Does this explain
why some of us are so hard
why some of us shine
why we are all precious

that we are awash in creation
spumed with diamonds
shot through with beauty
that survived the death of stars

* quotation found in a newspaper clipping on the subject



Taco Woman
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Encountering Grace

By Judith Dupré

When I open the photo attachment, I'm not quite sure what I'm seeing. The picture is blurry, an image of figures caught behind chicken wire. So I go back and re-read the email, sent by a woman who's read my book, Full of Grace: Encountering Mary in Faith, Art and Life. She writes that she has attached a "miracle picture" of a Nativity scene – and gushes that Mary and Joseph look "so alive," surrounded by "hundreds of angels, even thousands."

I can't see angels, not one, but if I squint, I can almost make out the Holy Family. What kind of faith does it take, I wonder, to see angels everywhere?

Full of Grace attempts to trace – through doctrine, history, art, and memoir – the many ways in which the beloved figure of the Virgin Mary flourishes today in faith, imagination, and fearsome everyday experience. Usually, the completion of a book marks the end of a journey, but in my case, it is proving to be a first step toward deeper understanding.

Surrendering to the Message

When I began the book six years ago, my goal was to distill the troves of Marian art and scholarship in a readable way. Given that more ink and paint have been spilled on Mary than on any other woman in history, that would be challenge enough! Certainly I had no intention of sharing my personal relationship with Mary with readers. But soon it became clear that she wasn't going to let me off the hook with an aloof third-person narrative. As I researched, I was bombarded by chance encounters, words, and images until I finally realized that my primary job was to surrender – and let Mary show me the book she wanted, one with many doors and windows that would allow glimpses of her compassion, love, and fine sense of humor, and would welcome readers of every description. Over time, however, I've come to understand that what she wanted most was my own change of heart.

Hundreds have shared their firsthand experiences of Mary's merciful intercession with me, opening my mind and melting my heart with the ways that she remains mysteriously yet vibrantly present. As a scared child, proud parent, grieving mother, and beloved icon, the Virgin Mary has become an indelible part of individuals' lives. Her wholehearted leap of faith has inspired others to do the same.

In conversations and by email, I have heard countless stories, not about quick spiritual fixes, but accounts of lived faith, dramatic testimony to the grace that springs from believing long after life seems to give no more reason to. Near strangers

Mary, who once sheltered Jesus, now shelters the vast numbers who long for comfort and meaning beyond what can be seen.

have revealed their struggles: "Am I going to really believe that God is in charge of my life and knows what's best for me?" And their convictions: "The Blessed Mother is the light in the harbor for all of us." Generously, they include me: "There's a line in Patty Griffin's song about Mary that kept playing in my mind as I was reading your book that says 'She leaves her fingerprints everywhere.' I think you understand what this means, too."

Repeatedly, I have witnessed faith far greater than mine, bestowed on those who would never dream of writing about it themselves yet who freely share this grace with me. It's humbling to be in the presence of your spiritual betters.

At book signings, women stand at the table, their arms wrapped around my book, holding it to their chests as though it were a breastplate, a talisman, or a comforting pillow. They pour out their stories and reasons. One is giving the book to a friend who is terminally ill, who needs hope. Another copy is going to a recent divorcee, who needs hope. Yet another to the parent of a disabled child, who needs hope. I know that their requests, whispered and as personal as prayers, have nothing to do with me — they are clinging to Mary herself. But my book somehow became a bit of flotsam in the great roiling sea of spiritual hunger out there. How can this be?

Where Earth and Heaven Connect

A poet once compared Mary to the very air we breathe — “wild air, world-mothering air, nestling me everywhere.” And to Gerard Manley Hopkins' apt description of her effortless, all-enveloping presence, I would add that she is also like the horizon line — that distant but ever-present and reassuring marker of the place where earth and heaven connect, where people come together in all their vulnerability and mystery.

There's no telling where she will leave her fingerprints. A 76-year-old grandfather and Green Bay Packers fan wrote in a spidery hand about keeping the Marian feminist perspective alive. A Los Angeles movie producer of cutting-edge special effects sent a poem, his first, inspired by Mary's ancient goddess antecedents: “A visage yielding, perfect marks moving in space, flawless placement/conjuring visions of deities praised for centuries/Details are blurred, contact is made/Like finding you are home unexpectedly.”

Church, Home, Kitchen

Something about Mary stirs people to imagine her presence as a room, a home, a temple. Because she bore the body of Christ, theologians have allegorized her as the Church, the sanctified Ark of the New Covenant, and the table at which faith sits. In the venerable Litany of Loreto, she is extolled as a house of gold, a tower of ivory, the gate of heaven. Mary, who once sheltered Jesus, now shelters the vast numbers who long for comfort and meaning beyond what can be seen. Medieval artists conjured this longing in depictions of “Our Lady of the Mantle” or *Schutzmantelmadonna*, in which Mary stretches out her cloak, enfolding and protecting those who huddle underneath it. It's not surprising to learn that the Statue of Liberty was conflated in the minds of

arriving European immigrants with this particular image of Mary, a beloved protectress, a giantess of compassion, who welcomed them at the portal of the new world.

Mary invites such leaps of imagination and grand architectural metaphors, just as she seems to inhabit every room of the house. The idea of being “at home” with Mary came up during a conversation with a wise Jewish man. We were talking about Mary's ubiquitous presence, and the extraordinary pull she has exerted across 2,000 years of Christian history. When he asked me where I felt her most, I replied immediately, the kitchen. Women of all stripes, levels of education, and professional accomplish-

I also feel Mary in my dining room with its big table, thinking of the happy times when friends and family have gathered around it.

ment have told me they feel Mary's presence most strongly there too, during those quiet hours when they are cooking, cleaning up the Chinese take-out, or emptying the dishwasher. As Kathleen Norris beautifully expressed it in *The Quotidian Mysteries*, there is something about the sameness of those obligatory routines, unfolding in the most familiar room of the home, one's breath slowed to a meditative rhythm that can unearth the transcendent.

But I also feel Mary in my dining room with its big table, thinking of the happy times when friends and family have gathered around it. And in the living room, where my son plays piano, his sweet notes wafting upstairs while I'm puttering around the bedroom and transforming even the making of a bed into a joyful task. I feel Mary in my garden, especially in October, when most of the flowers are gone except for one or two persistent roses that I count on seeing every autumn.

Mary is here, right now.

Full of Grace became a hymn in honor of the Virgin Mary's presence in the many literal and metaphoric rooms of my life, as well as a prayer that I would continue to feel at home in her company. Not because I am worthy of it, but because her example helps to clarify and deepen my faith. I keep looking at that blurry Nativity photo. Sometimes I think I can see the angels, sometimes not, but I know I will keep trying.

Judith Dupré '11 M.Div. writes about art and architecture, and consults on the design of public building projects that foster community and uphold the human spirit. Full of Grace: Encountering Mary in Faith, Art and Life was published last year by Random House.

No Peace Without Women

By Zainab Salbi

(Adapted with permission from a TED presentation that the author gave last year)

I am a woman who lived in war, who continues to work in war, and who has learned in my forty years of life on this earth that there is another side of war.

You see, I grew up in war-torn Iraq. I grew up with the colors of war – the red colors of fire and blood, the brown tones of earth as it exploded in our faces, the piercing silver of an exploded missile so bright that nothing can protect you from its color.

I grew up with the sounds of war. The staccato sounds of gunfire, the wrenching booms of explosions, the ominous drones of jets flying overhead, and the wailing warning sounds of sirens. Those

It is time to see the other side of war. It is time to understand war and peace as women see it and feel it.

are sounds you would expect. But there's also the dissonant concert of a flock of birds screeching in the night, the high-pitched, honest cries of children, and the thunderous, unbearable silence. The silence is the worst. It is the silence of children so terrorized they do not scream. War, said a friend of mine, is not about sound at all, but about silence: the silence of humanity.

The Shapes of Fear

I have since left Iraq and dedicated my life to working with other women survivors of war from places like the Congo, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Bosnia. All wars bring about the same fear: a fear of not only losing loved ones but, as Samjia, a Bosnian woman, once said to me, a fear “of losing the I in me.”

Over the years of working with women in wars, I have learned that the fear comes in many shapes. The worst shape of all is when a person feels as if she is dying over and over again. As a Palestinian

woman once told me, “There are times in which I feel I’ve died ten times a day,” recalling how soldiers patrolled her neighborhood day and night, punctuating their rounds with gunfire. “But there is only one life, and there should be only one death.”

Without knowing the smell, the color, and the feel of war, we lack a full, nuanced, comprehensive understanding of it. We distract ourselves with high-level preoccupations over troop levels, draw-down timelines, surges, and sting operations, when we should be examining the details of where the social fabric has been most torn, where the community has improvised solutions that sustain life despite tremendous obstacles.

These are the two sides of war. On the one side: seemingly objective discussions of politics, tactics, weapons, dollars, and “casualties.” This is a language of sterility. How *casually* we treat *casualties* in the context of this debate. This is where you conceive of rape and these casualties as inevitabilities.

Then there is the other side: it sees the colors, smells the smells, touches the clammy skin of death, and washes clean the sticky liquid of blood.

There is the side of war that fights, and there is the side that keeps the schools, the factories, and the hospitals open.

There is the side that thinks of peace as the end of fighting, and there is the side that thinks of peace as the arrival of schools and jobs.

There is the side that is led by men, and there is the side that is led by women. Both sides belong to the same coin, but, unfortunately, the world typically sees only one side of the coin. It is time to see the other side of war. It is time to understand war and peace as women see it and feel it.

In a brutal irony, violence spikes after peace accords are signed. Men with guns who have seen unspeakable horrors demobilize, return home, and take aggression out on the most vulnerable people: women. In the five years since Sudan's peace accords were signed, violence has been increasing to

Witness what women are doing to survive and you will never want to stop investing in them. Listen to the songs women sing and you will want to sing with them.

its highest levels since the conflict. That's the toenail perspective of peace. It is time to understand war and peace from that toenail perspective. If we ignore it, I am afraid we will miss out on building a lasting and true peace.

We know the statistics about women's experience of war:

- 75 percent of modern war casualties are women and children.
- 80 percent of refugees world wide are women and children.
- Women historically have faced violent acts of mass rape and mutilation, from the rape of an estimated two million German women by Soviet and Allied forces in World War II to the rape of hundreds of thousands of Congolese women occurring today.

These statistics, egregious as they are, are yet still understatements of the horrors women have seen.

Women's Battles

What is missing is Nehai's story, from Gaza. She's a woman who spent her time organizing bread baking and distribution to all the neighbors during the few hours of ceasefire in the last war in Gaza.

Or what about Farida's story, the piano teacher in Sarajevo who walked through the snipers' alley every day during the four-year siege of the city to keep the music school open? That was her fight in the war.

Against this backdrop of the millions of Nehais and Faridas of the world, it is incredibly unfair of us to limit our conceptions of women in war to the image of the disempowered, helpless victim. It is unfair to exclude women from peace negotiations that define the terms of justice and award coveted leadership posts in new and interim governments. Less than 3 percent of all peace agreements have women as signatories.

It is time to change that dynamic. No peace without women: We need to make sure that at least half the members of negotiating teams during peace

talks are women. This is the only way we can ensure that negotiations are not only focused on disarmament, demobilization, and defining the terms of power, but also on infrastructure, job creation, and building schools and hospitals for all men and women, boys and girls.

We must invest in the success of these women – in their contributions to peace negotiations and their visions for rebuilding their communities. The United States has spent more than \$1 trillion on the soldiers fighting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but only some half a billion on the grassroots women who still struggle to define and maintain peace. How can women meaningfully contribute if they can't afford to travel to the capital cities for the peace talks, if they don't have the resources for associations, computers, internet access, and all the tools we take for granted every day in which we attempt to effect change?

It's time to flip the coin. Witness what women are doing to survive and you will never want to stop investing in them.

Listen to the songs women sing and you will want to sing with them.

Appreciate the other side of war and you will believe in the stories of survival and hope.

Zainab Salbi is founder and CEO of Women for Women International (www.womenforwomen.org), a grassroots humanitarian and development organization helping women survivors of wars rebuild their lives. Since 1993, the organization has helped 299,000 women survivors of wars access social and economic opportunities through vocational skills education, rights awareness training, and income-generating opportunities. In its eighteen-year history, the organization has distributed more than \$95 million in direct aid and microcredit loans.





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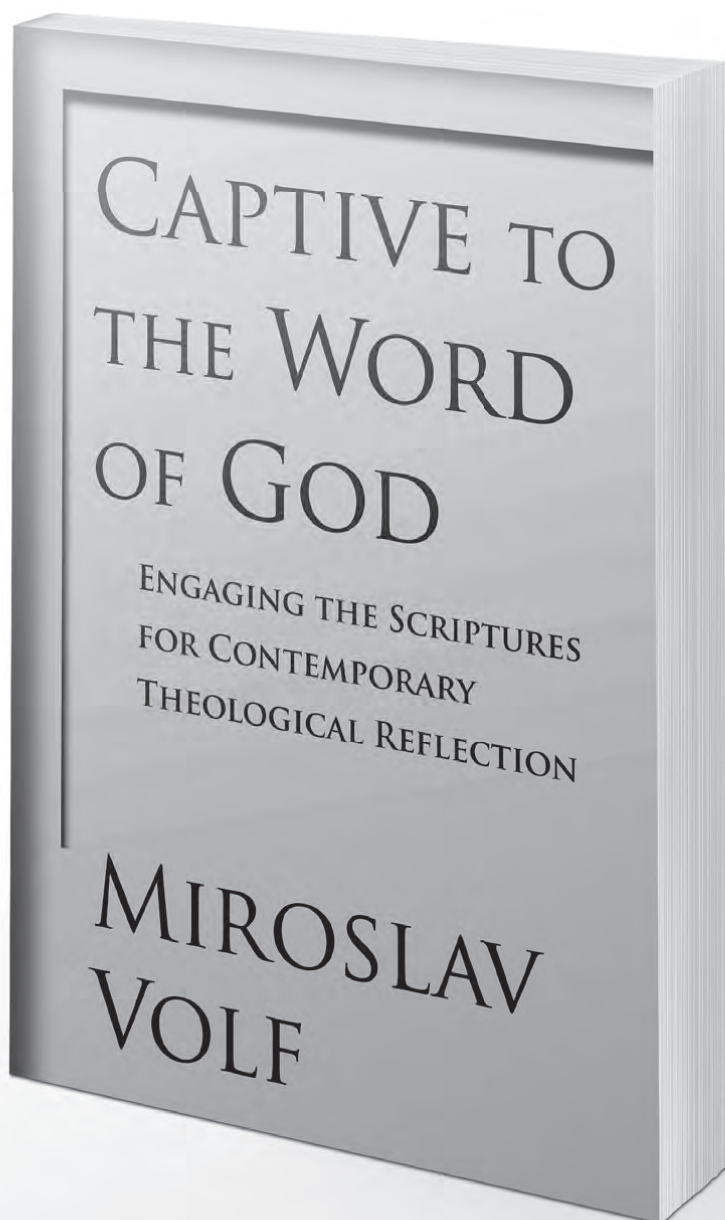
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From the Editor: Unfinished Business

By Ray Waddle



"O God, do not judge! You never were a woman on this earth!" the bold, restless Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) once declared.

With Job-like insistence, her plea stakes a claim for the experience of being female. In Tsvetaeva's case, this included terrible years on the run from poverty, famine, and Stalinist terror as a young mother in Soviet Russia. But exuberance finds a way to the light. So does the voice, the sheer force of a woman's witness.

Tsvetaeva's startling words come to mind as I behold this *Reflections* issue on women, which hopes to catch something of the spirit of progress experienced by women in twenty-first century life. In essays, poetry, and artwork, their rigor and poise come through. Unmistakable also is an embattled dimension of peril, a sense that so many battles waged by and with women – the right to power, the right to be respected, the right to be heard – must be fought and re-fought over and over again.

A glance at recent trends and research confirms a theme of unfinished business. Warnings ring out that hard-won gains for women can be lost. Stubborn statistics show women continue to be disproportionately vulnerable in this reckless world of poverty, disease, and war.

On the American scene, three recent books handily map out a contradiction of our times – women have made great gains, yet remain under threat – and make arguments about the unfinished business of winning political power and good health.

- In *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild* (Palgrave, 2007), Deborah Siegel says feminism faces steep challenges today. It was always marked by inner conflict and outer controversy, she says, but tensions notably exist today between younger women and older feminists over strategies and values. The times favor Twitter individualism, not collective power: feminism is made to appear glum and passé. Nonsense, says Siegel. The putdown of feminism is a stale sport, as old and discredited as the ridicule of the right to vote. But she worries that younger women define feminism today as sexual empowerment only. But that's not enough. Collective action that unites women across generational, class, and racial lines is needed to increase their representation in Congress and busi-

ness and to reduce poverty and violence against women everywhere. "If those who support gender parity in this country can't talk to each other or get along, then feminism's grandchildren may pay the ultimate price," she says.

- With today's opportunities, girls should be happier than their grandmothers were at their age, says Dr. Leonard Sax in *Girls on the Edge: The Four Factors Driving the New Crisis for Girls* (Basic Books, 2010). Yet many girls are vulnerable to brittle anxiety and depression, failing to develop a sturdy inner life, he warns. Sax notes four factors: 1) Girls are pushed to present themselves sexually at earlier ages. 2) Texting reinforces hyper-connection with peers but disconnection with themselves. 3) Too many girls obsess about just one dimension of their lives (being thin, being a top student). 4) Toxins in food, lotions, and drinks worsen health problems. Sax says compassionate mentors can help girls develop self-confidence and personhood. Youngsters need perspective on cyber obsessions and toxic ingredients. Religion benefits girls especially – when girls connect with congregational life, they smoke and drink less and feel better about themselves.

- How do we square female inequalities (workplace wages, health care erosions) with the many media images of female power (Oprah, Hillary Clinton, Rachel Maddow, Condi Rice, UConn women's basketball, Katie Couric)? In *Enlightened Sexism* (Henry Holt, 2010), author Susan Douglas says we face a profound cultural contradiction: feminist values of equality inform society as never before, but they collide with a force that has been gaining momentum since the 1990s – "enlightened sexism." Enlightened sexism says sexual bravado and consumerism are healthy signs of female power; the old battles for equality and respect have been won. Enlightened sexism encourages younger women to worry about their appearance and be competitive with other women. Hence the explosion of make-overs, supermodels, hypergirliness, and strip clubs. Douglas says it's time to meet resurgent sexism with ridicule and a rededication to the goals of the women's movement.

On the occasion of celebrating eight decades of women at Yale Divinity School, *Reflections* is proud to serve as a testament to some of the arguments, witnesses, and voices who speak to the dreams and conditions of half the human race.

CREDITS

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POETRY

Mayne Ellis is a poet, writer, and self-employed virtual assistant who lives in Victoria, British Columbia.

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Jan Jorgensen '86 M.A.R. '91 M.Div. lives in Montreal. She is pastor of Willsboro Congregational United Church of Christ in Willsboro, NY. Her poetry has appeared in *Vallum* poetry magazine and assorted chapbooks.

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Martha Serpas '94 M.Div. teaches in the creative writing program at the University of Houston. She is the author of two poetry collections, *Côte Blanche* (New Issues Poetry & Prose, 2002) and *The Dirty Side of the Storm* (Norton, 2008).

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Kathi Wolfe '78 M.Div. is a writer and poet in Falls Church, VA. She writes a column on books and poetry for *Scene4* (www.scene4.com), an international monthly arts magazine. Her poetry has appeared in *Gargoyle*, *The Potomac Review*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, and other publications.

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