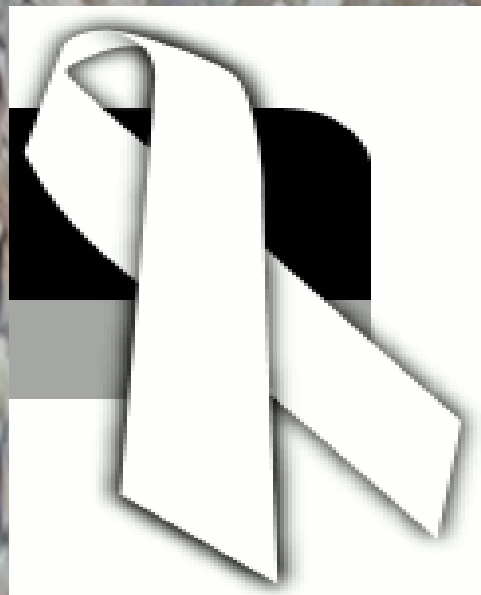


**THE  
CHURCH  
AND  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN**

**A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION COURSE**



**Prepared by WEAVERS: Women in Theological Education of  
South Pacific Association of Theological Schools**

# **THE CHURCH AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**



**Weavers: Women in Theological Education  
November 2006**

# **THE CHURCH AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

The Church and Violence against Women

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Weavers

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## FOREWORD

*The Church and Violence against Women* is the end product of a four-year project that began in 2003 with a forum to raise people's awareness on how women and children are affected by violence. This was followed by a regional workshop in 2004 to conscientize the participants about the seriousness of violence. In 2006, a regional curriculum consultation of South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) member schools was held to review a draft of materials prepared by the Weavers' Violence Against Women Committee. This consultation also helped in designing the final form of this study material.

This is a Weavers' dream come true! We have finally managed to make a practical contribution toward the enrichment of the current theological curriculum. It is Weavers' hope that this course will become a tool to help those who study it gain a better understanding of the factors affecting our human relationships. We pray that it will contribute to a reduction if not elimination, of violence against women.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Dr Joan A. Filemoni-Tofaeono, the former coordinator of Weavers who pioneered this VAW project. Thanks also goes to the founding coordinator of Weavers, Lisa Meo who courageously advocated for women's concerns to be included in theological education in the Pacific. May their vision of partnership and equality continue to empower women and men in theological education.

I acknowledge with heartfelt appreciation the efforts of those who have contributed to the production of this material, with my special thanks to Rosalyn Nokise, Tevita Havea and Koila Olsson.

I also acknowledge with appreciation the work of the following contributors: Rev. Dr. Taipisia Leilua, Ivan Williams, Akanisi Tarabe, Shamima Ali and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Titilia Vokadewavosa, Taumua Toma, Rev. Dr. Feleterika Nokise, Tevita N. Banivanua and Vikatolia Solomone.

Weavers appreciates greatly the generosity of those who have funded this project which would not have been possible if it were not for your kind donations. May this manual enable us all to understand one another better, and may it strengthen our mission as the church to overcome violence against women and all of God's creation.

Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko  
Coordinator of Weavers  
SPATS  
Suva  
FIJI

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## **About the Course**

*The Church and Violence against Women* is an interdisciplinary course that brings together secular, theological, Biblical, ministry and church history views on the issue of violence in general and specifically, violence against women.

These materials have been designed primarily for use in SPATS' member schools as an interdisciplinary course. Given sufficient command of written English, the materials may be considered appropriate for any level of the curriculum.

The Study Book and Reader which form the course materials, has been designed for individual self study but could provide the basis for discussion groups, tutorials and seminars. For less academic purposes, it supplies information and ideas for talks or lectures (and sermons?) and may be of use outside of a formal curriculum.

Unfortunately, it seems that most societies are blighted by violence, including violence against women. While the course materials contain some accounts of actual violence having taken place, it is suggested that referring to local examples will be important to drive home the need for us all, in our immediate localities, to be active in combating this scourge.

## **Aims**

The aims of this course are to

- \* emphasize for its users the reality of violence against women in our communities as well as in the global community;
- \* have users review their own knowledge of and attitude towards this phenomenon, and to
- \* help in the development of skills and determination to combat it.

The course should help us to recognize the significance of the redemptive and prophetic role of the Church in condemning violence and to activate that role in combating it.

## **Learning Objectives**

There are two main types of objectives of this course, one is knowledge based and the other is skills based.

From a knowledge-based perspective, the course should develop the user's ability to achieve the following objectives:

- to be able to identify the many forms of violence and to delineate in particular violence against women;
- to define human rights as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- to explain human rights in terms of its biblical and theological foundations;
- to identify key texts that have been used to justify and tolerate violence against women;
- to identify texts that condemn violence against women
- to define the role of the Church in combating violence against women.

From a skills based perspective, the participant at the end of the course should

- be able to select and interpret critically Biblical stories where violence is overcome, and to compare them with stories from our own communities;
- be able to demonstrate practical skills (preaching, pastoral caring, pastoral counselling, etc.) effective in the fight to overcome violence against women.
- be able to identify and change one's participation in violence

## **Study/learning strategies**

The following methodologies are recommended for this course. It is, of course, up to the learning facilitator to select the most appropriate ways to deliver the content depending on the needs, culture and environment of learning of the participants. Other methodologies could be added to the list below.

- Lectures
- Group discussions
- Story telling sessions
- Personal testimony - informal talk (localize setting of discussion)
- Audio & Video presentations
- Guest lecturers and speakers including panel discussions from churches, cultural groups and organizations dealing with violence. (Health, Law, Women's Crisis Centres, Refuge centers etc.)
- Role plays/skits
- Use of appropriate photographs, art work
- Case studies.

- Visits to Crisis Centres, prisons, human rights organizations

Although the course materials are designed for independent study, the content may be delivered in a variety of ways to achieve the course objectives.

## Course requirements and assessment

If this course is going to form part of an assessed curriculum, the following guidelines for completion and assessment might prove useful.

In order to meet the requirements of this course it is essential that the students submit all pieces of work for assessment.

- Assessment is based on 50% coursework and 50% final examination.
- Three coursework items will be assessed:
  - \* active participation (contributions to class discussions) (10%)
  - \* a presentation (and sharing) in class of an original case study (10%)
  - \* a Term Paper on a relevant aspect of the life of the Church as a redemptive Church in the New Testament. (30%)
- \* A final examination in which the content of the course will be examined. (50%)

## Course Outline

The following schedule is a tentative one and not prescriptive. For SPATS schools and colleges the course may be covered in two hours of face-to-face class time per week plus at least as much private study time, for one term.

Weeks	Topics
<b>1–2</b>	<b>Introduction to the Course</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Course outline</li> <li>○ Aims and Objectives</li> <li>○ Course requirements</li> <li>○ Introduction to violence</li> </ul>
<b>3–4</b>	<b>Unit 1: Facts about Violence</b>
1.1	Introduction



- 1.2 Biblical and theological meaning of violence
- 1.3 Common concerns about violence
  - What is violence?
  - The different forms of violence
  - Statistics on violence
- 1.4 Violence against women in Pacific cultures
- 1.5 Why do men abuse women?
- 1.6 Why do women stay in situations of domestic violence?
  - Self-Blame
  - Confusion between violence and love
  - Violence as attention
  - Family pride and honour
  - Women as passive and nurturing
  - Violence and isolation
  - Threat of increased violence
  - Society's lack of resources
- 1.7 Impact on children
  - Discussion questions
  - References

## **5–6 Unit 2: Human Rights and Violence**

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Defining and applying the concepts 'rights' and 'human rights'
  - What is a right?
  - What does respect for a right mean?
  - Who has these rights?
  - Some examples of 'human rights'
  - Are rights a new idea for the Pacific?
  - Do we have to do anything in return for rights?
- 2.3 Biblical and theological perspectives on human rights
- 2.4 How are human rights 'Christian'?
  - Discussion questions
  - References

## **7–8 Unit 3: Violence against Women and the Bible**

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Violence in the scriptures
- 3.3 Textual criticism and theological constructions in the service of Violence or Peace?
  - \* Old Testament texts (Hebrew Texts) and their theological implications.
  - \* New Testament texts (Christian Texts) and their theological implications.
- 3.4 A process for critical textual critique and theological analysis
  - Discussion questions

	References
<b>9-10</b>	<b>Unit 4: The Church and its Role in Overcoming Violence</b>
4.1	Introduction
4.2	The redemptive and prophetic role of the church
4.3	The role of the church in the light of the biblical stories in which violence is overcome
4.4	Relevant approaches the church could use in overcoming violence
	Discussion questions
	References
<b>11-14</b>	<b>Class Presentations, Recapitulation and Evaluation</b>

# UNIT 1: FACTS ABOUT VIOLENCE

**Psalm 141:1-2** “O Lord, I call to you; come quickly to me.  
Hear my voice when I call to you. May my  
prayer be set before you like incense; may the  
lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.”

## Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define violence
- differentiate the many forms of violence
- describe the impact of violence on women and children’s lives
- state your country’s situation in relation to the issue of violence against women
- share your own experience as survivor and/or perpetrator of violence.

**You should also record (write down) your own reactions to the various issues raised in the unit.**

## UNIT 1: FACTS ABOUT VIOLENCE

### 1.1 Introduction

This unit provides a review of violence, what violence is, why violence occurs, and the impact of violence on people's lives. This unit will also address the biblical and theological understanding of violence against women. It brings to our attention the facts about the various forms of violence against women in order to help us understand the gravity of this problem and find ways to solve it

### 1.2 The Biblical and Theological Meaning of Violence.

*2 Samuel 13:1-22 "The Rape of Tamar"*

*...David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat. "Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister." "Don't, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her....*

The story of the rape of Tamar is one of the many stories of violence in the Bible. It clearly shows that violence has no respect for family and blood connections. In this context, we view scriptures perpetuating violence against women and reinforcing the degrading image of women as property of men.

*Throughout human history violence has been the standard way of expressing anger and frustration. Violence has been so much a part of daily life that its presence has come to be accepted as almost inevitable and even acceptable. It is not surprising then, that there are many examples of violence in the Bible. In the Old*

*Testament we can even read of God acting in a violent way  
(Violence in the Family, May 1994).*

The Bible begins with the origin myths which present the deepest truth of our existence as human beings in relation to God. God created all things in creation including human beings and creation was declared by God as good. The Sabbath represents the joy and celebrations of the very goodness of creation where all things existed in harmonious and peaceful relationships with God and with everything else. But then sin broke that relationship with God because of the disobedience of human beings. That is the beginning of violence. Thus violence is sin. Sin is in the breaking of human relationships and our alienation from God, from self, from others and from the rest of creation. It is human beings' disobedience against God. Violence against women is deeply rooted in the sin of human beings' disobedience against God.

**Reading 1**, Marie M. Fortune claims that, "...much suffering is caused by human sinfulness: sinful acts by some bring suffering to others" (Fortune, 2002:243.) Read on. What is God's response to this sinfulness?

### 1.3 Common Concerns about Violence

In order to understand the severity of the issue of violence, we need to examine some of the common concerns. We need to begin with the fact that violence against women is a universal problem.

*Violence against women cuts across social and economic situations and is deeply embedded in cultures around the world – so much so that millions of women consider it a way of life (Cate Johnson, 1997).*

**Read Reading 2, "Violence in the Pacific" pages 57 to 63** What, does the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) claim, are some of the adverse results for women of political and ethnic unrest?

#### What is violence?

Violence may be defined in various ways. Simply stated, violence is words and actions that hurt people. These actions are often justified by existing norms, values, belief systems, cultures and social structures of societies. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as:

*The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (WHO, 2002:5).*

“Violence against women is the threatened or actual use of physical force against a woman that either results in or has the potential to result in injury or death. This type of violence includes the physical, sexual or psychological assault of women by partners, intimates, family members and acquaintances” (Center for Disease Control, 1995).

The steering committee of the Council of Europe presented their report on the nature of violence against women. Their findings are as follows:

- Most abuse of women and girls is perpetrated by men and such abuse is endemic in most societies;
- Abuse of women and girls can take place in a range of physical locations, including homes, social events, institutions and public places;
- A range of perpetrators are involved, and while most are men known to women, many incidents also involve acquaintances or strangers, and any definition must take account of the range of relationships which can be involved. This can include family members, partners and ex-partners, relatives, friends, acquaintances, those in authority and strangers;
- A wide range of behaviours may be involved in the abuse, including physical, sexual and psychological violence;
- Violence against women and girls is used to assert control and is related to the gender imbalance of power in society. It is further perpetrated through inequality of access to resources (financial and other) and its legitimisation by structural inequalities;
- Violence against women and girls is also related to international power relations and inequality between countries;
- Such violence can be seen to encompass behaviours such as, for example, beating and physical injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, psychological violence, a range of harmful traditional/cultural practices, rape, harassment, intimidation, trafficking in women and prostitution.
- On the basis of this common information, therefore, the nature of the issue becomes clear. Violence against women can be seen, in the above context, to include a wide range of physical, sexual, psychological, economic and structural violence.
- The Group concluded that, within this overall framework, it is impossible to identify an exhaustive list, as gender violence can also take many individual forms, and can occur in many contexts and relationships,

having a range of effects on women and creating and sustaining broader inequalities (*Adapted from Council of Europe Report, June 1998*).

***As you read through Reading 3, make a list of the forms of violence mentioned.***

### **The different forms of violence**

There are various forms of violence- some are direct while others take more indirect forms. According to Shamima Ali of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre,

*“The direct forms of violence occurs when one person assumes the right to dominate another and decide to use violence or abuse as a means of ensuring that dominate on. Violence behaviour involves assault, sexual abuse of women and children and economic, social and psychological and spiritual abuse.”* (Shamima Ali, 1997)

***You will find many actual examples of different kinds of violence against women and children in Reading 2.***

***Read the section of Reading 2 headed, “**Impacts** of Violence against Women”. What are the three basic rights of women expressed by the United Nations? List some long-term effects for women resulting from violence against them.***

### **Statistics on violence**

The statistics on violence around the world, the Pacific region and even within individual country is alarming. About 95 percent of victims of violence in the home are women and the perpetrators are men. And 41.6 percent of the cases of violence were pregnant and about 47.9 percent of married women admitted that they have been forced to have sex with their husbands (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Study, 2001). These figures clearly reflect the severity of the problem and the necessity of moving beyond awareness to implement action to eliminate violence in church and society.

***Read the section in Reading 2 “**Impacts of Violence against Women and Children**” for some telling statistics.***

***What evidence is there to suggest that violence against women is increasing in the South Pacific? How reliable is the evidence for the increase?***

Reported cases of violence in Fiji 1984 to 2005

YEAR	Domestic Violence	Rape	Sexual Harassment	Child Abuse	Others	TOTAL
1984	5	3	0	0	0	8
1985	26	3	0	3	39	71
1986	35	3	0	2	83	123
1987	58	7	0	1	92	158
1988	123	9	0	1	180	313
1989	175	5	0	1	211	392
1990	212	10	0	0	203	425
1991	245	4	0	11	244	504
1992	248	10	0	8	259	525
1993	240	13	0	14	391	658
1994	257	33	0	14	566	870
1995	331	30	0	33	490	884
1996	469	26	0	29	469	993
1997	405	18	5	19	505	952
1998	484	20	15	53	559	1131
1999	544	21	19	24	661	1269
2000	361	25	8	28	595	1017
2001	449	23	10	28	722	1232
2002	429	21	10	33	766	1259
2003	394	26	23	20	643	1106
2004	572	20	12	35	508	1147
Dec-05	480	17	18	42	371	928
TOTAL	6542	347	120	399	8557	15965

*(Adapted from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Website)*



## 1.4 Violence Against Women in Pacific Cultures

The male dominated structures that control most Pacific societies reinforce the treatment of women as second class citizens. Women as a result of this become passive and less critical of the unjust structures oppressing them. Thus, women's oppressive status makes them vulnerable to male violence which often happens in the home. Thus, domestic violence is the most common form of assault in different countries of the Pacific.

Violence against women is a social reality and serious concern in the Pacific. Thus, it has become an issue within the realms of the church and society. About 95 per cent of victims of violence in the home are women and the perpetrators are men. And 41.6 per cent of the cases of violence were pregnant and about 47.9 per cent of married women admitted that they have been forced to have sex with their husbands (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Study, 2001). These figures clearly reflect the severity of the problem and the necessity of moving beyond awareness to implement action to eliminate violence in church and society.

In discussing violence, we are confronted with an issue that exposes our true Pacific reality. It is a reality represented in the shattered dreams and broken bodies of many women in the Pacific. According to a UNIFEM report, "...Violence against women is a priority issue for action in the Pacific region because it is a major human rights issue affecting women." (UNIFEM, Pacific Regional Workshop on Strengthening Partnerships for Eliminating Violence Against Women, 17-19 February 2003, Suva, Fiji).

"The multi-sectoral facet of violence makes it even more complicated for us to comprehend. This is due to the significant interplay between traditions, culture, religion, education, community expectations, the role of women and power relations in contributing to this problem" (UNIFEM). "In fact in the Pacific, much of what we may term as violence comes from what our cultural stands demand. This is one of the most difficult areas since what we have come to know as violence has been part of life for a very long time and has taken roots in different communities in the region." (Weavers, July–August 2004, Suva, Fiji)

In the Pacific region, networks have been created by women's groups at national, regional and global levels. They are growing in strength and impact. The Pacific Regional Network Against Violence Against Women (such as Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, *Mapusaga o Aiga* etc) have continued to raise awareness at all levels in pursuing positive changes in community attitudes and practices relating to violence.

Violence against women is endemic. It reduces women's choices even further, perpetuating abuse. Women and girls are no longer safe in their homes, workplaces, churches and communities, because violence against them has become an obsession for some males.

*What are “the basic structures” of society mentioned in Reading 2 that ought to be challenged in order “to bring about positive changes for women”?*

*Reading 2, states that “cultural and religious fundamentalism is on the rise in Fiji and the Pacific” In what ways does FWCC claim that this is affecting women adversely? **THIS QUOTE IS NOT IN THE READING***

*Pick out references to religion and the churches in Reading 3 and explain their connection with violence against women according to Ali.*

## 1.5 Why do Men Abuse Women?

There are many theories about male violence against women. Men may engage in domestic violence because of:

- \* alcoholism and drug addiction
- \* unhealthy relationship between husband and wife
- \* inability to handle angry feelings without violence
- \* mental illness resulting from childhood trauma or abuse
- \* frustration at unemployment or the humiliation of poverty
- \* women are thought of as property to be owned rather than partners in a marriage
- \* violence is modeled and taught to boys as a way of making them “men”
- \* the interpretation of the Biblical scripture in a narrow way which says that man is the head of the house

*(Adapted from Domestic Violence Centre: <http://www.dvc.org.nz/dvtheory.htm>)*

Many cases of violence against women are caused by power inequality in families, churches and societies. “Men still believe that women are their possessions and they can do what they like with them”(Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre).

*Make a note here of any examples known to you in your own community of violence by men due to any of the causes listed above.*

### Power Analysis

The issue of violence against women or violence in general is an issue of power and control. It requires a re-examination of how power is distributed in various contexts. Thus, male dominated structures within Pacific churches and societies reinforce the abuse of power and they legitimize violence against women. Therefore any analysis of violence against women involves an analysis of power within a particular society and church, especially of the forces that give shape to gender inequality and consequently an abuse of power.

*Study the characteristics in the ‘Power & Control Wheel’. Are any of these characteristics existing in your home, community, or church?*

# Power & Control wheel



*Adapted from:*

Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota  
 National Collective Of Independent Women's Refuges Inc. NZ

## 1.6 Why do Women Stay in Situations of Domestic Violence?

Statistically, women leaving their partners permanently have had approximately five previous separations to their ultimate and final dissolution of the relationships. It is unclear how many women stay in abusive relationships because research has focused on those women who leave.

There is overwhelming evidence that suggests that women tend to have stronger relational bonds than men, and in turn are more likely to maintain emotional attachments even in the face of danger. It is not easy to leave people that you love. Leaving an intimate relationship triggers sadness about losing the promise offered by love no matter how unfulfilled, as well as fears of being lost without the other. When violence enters, it worsens the suffering women feel from trying to figure out whether a relationship is worth saving.

When women consider leaving an abusive relationship, they do so after understanding the costs. Emotional attachment, love for their children, race, religion, ethnicity, as well as economic cost. A woman may also feel she must keep the family intact because of culture and religious values. Many women do not seek help of safety when they suffer from domestic violence. These are some reasons why they do not seek assistance:

### \* **Self-Blame**

Most children grow up with the belief that “bad things happen to bad people”. When women are abused, many believe that they must have done something wrong to deserve the punishment. Women may blame themselves for causing the battering. Men and other women may contribute to this by suggesting that if the women cleaned the house better cooked faster, kept away from other men, kept the children quiet, for example then she would not have been beaten. In reality, there are no excuses for wife battering. All issues or problems between men and women can and must be **addressed** without violence. **THE QUOTE NOT IN THE READING**

### \* **Confusion between violence and love**

Many parents discipline their children with violence through hitting and slapping. Parents often tell children “I am doing this because I love you and I want you to grow up with good behaviour.” Children get this message that violent punishment is a form of love. Some women think that being battered is an expression of love or care for them.

### \* **Violence as attention**

Some women see the abuse from the partners as a form of attention. Some researches suggest that being ignored or neglected is experienced as a severe form of psychological violence. Rather than being ignored, some women prefer to have men act jealous and violent against them because they think it is a way the man is paying attention to them.

**\* Family pride and honour**

A woman may disgrace her family if she reports domestic violence. Acknowledging that there are problems within a family is sometimes seen as bringing shame to the family. In order to protect the reputation of the women's larger family network, she may choose to keep silent about domestic violence.

**\* Women as passive and nurturing**

Women are taught to be passive and nurturing. When women are in violent relationships, they may feel that they have to be quiet in response to abuse. Some women will feel responsible for taking care of the family relationships, so they will stay in a violent home in order to please other people and to show that they are a "good wife".

**\* Violence and isolation**

The more problems such as violence, drug abuse and incest that a family experiences the more likely the family will be isolated from their relatives and community. The more isolated a family is from others support networks, the more the problems will increase.

**\* Threat of increased violence**

If a woman reports on domestic violence or seeks help from others, her spouse may seek revenge and threaten her with even more violence. She may keep quiet to protect herself and her children.

**\* Coping mechanisms**

Women may "forget" about violence against them because to identify it may cause too much stress or pain. Women may also "minimize" the abuse and claim that it isn't affecting them emotionally or physically even if it is. Denying the reality or severity of abuse also occurs in some women.

**\* Society's lack of resources and responses**

Many women are unable to identify and address violence against themselves because of a lack of resources, social support, legal remedies, employment opportunities or resources to support their children. If a woman believes that nothing will be done to address the violence if she reports it, then there is no reason for her to seek help.

*(Adapted from University of Alaska, Anchorage, Training Materials on Domestic Violence)*

Men are not any more "naturally violent" than women according to most research. Both women and men have the potential for great violence. Yet men commit the most violence in the world at the international level, national level, in the community and in home environment. Some communities pressure men and women to conform to gender roles. Men are encouraged to act masculine and women are encouraged to act feminine. In many communities, men are asked to prove their masculinity through violence. Sometimes women pressure men to be violent to prove that they are "real men".

\* Most men are socialized to be masculine. Most cultures connect masculinity to courage, competition, assertiveness, and ambition that are expressed through physical aggression and violence and suppression of other emotions.

\* Young boys are encouraged to repress empathy, to be tough and fearless, not to cry and to value winning or dominating over others.

\* In an attempt to act masculine and play the roles society has defined for men, many women make ‘detached decisions’ without concern for the human suffering they will bring to others.

## 1.7 Impact on Children

Trauma literature suggests that children recover quickly from disasters if they resume “normal” a routine as possible. The longer it takes for them to do so, the more likely they are to experience post-traumatic stress disorder.

The experience with violence is that we can pretend it did not happen; we can reassure ourselves (and our children) it was an isolated event, or we obsess about our helplessness or fear in relation to it. We try to exert control over the violence by being afraid of it or otherwise denying it. We do not make enough efforts to understand it; we simply fear it, avoid it or deny it. What is becoming clear is that we have no language for violence. We have no words to put it. We have only memory to share or deny. If we share it and seek to learn more about it we can recover. If we repress it our worlds become restricted. We don’t go to the movies: we don’t talk.

If we are able to think of violence in broad terms, then we need to think of violence along a continuum, that includes emotional, financial, physical, and sexual violence. The continuum of violence is unique to each person. When we are reflective, each of us knows when a push feels playful or not, to us, may or may not parallel what feels abusive to others. If we do not create a language for discussing these issues, or an opportunity to learn more about each other’s relationship to abuse, we will continue to misjudge and misunderstand intimate violence as isolated events that come out of nowhere.

A child who experienced violence is three times more likely to become **violent** in adult intimate relationships than a child who was not hit. Studies indicate that men who grew up with mothers who were excessively critical are much more likely to abuse their intimate partners in adulthood.

In studies conducted children were aware of what was happening in their homes. A major impact of living with domestic violence was on these children’s sense of safety and the actions they took to protect themselves from what was happening like hiding away or locking themselves in the bedroom. Some children reported effects which we would expect to find in those living with fear on a daily basis- what is referred to as living with domestic terrorism-sleeplessness, bedwetting, and nightmare. When the perpetrator no longer made contact, the children felt safe. The sense of displacement and loss, that fleeing from violence produces, should not be underestimated. Children resent having to leave their home, possessions, pets and friends.

Children can experience:

\*Internalised distress: depression, withdrawal, anxiety/fear

\*Externalised distress: aggression, difficult behaviour

\*Stress indicators: problems with sleeping, with eating, with toileting,  
lower achievement at school, truanting, drug/alcohol abuse,  
becoming overly compliant or aggressive.

*Refer to the wheel diagram below for more details on how violence affects children.  
List some of these effects.*

# How Violence Affects Children wheel



Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota  
National Collective Of Independent Women's Refuges Inc. NZ



### Case studies:

#### *Fiji*

*Sherina Lata 19, Renuka Lata 18, and Radhika Roshni Lata 17, of Naria in Rakiraki disappeared on June 30 after they went on a picnic trip to Malake Island in Ra (Fiji) with a neighbour. He had first claimed that six Fijian men had attacked him and kidnapped the sisters. After a week of intensive investigations by police, he later confessed to killing the sisters and dumping their bodies off the coast of Malake Island (The Fiji Times, July 14, 2005).*

#### *Samoa*

*A 12 year old girl who was nine months pregnant had been raped by an uncle. The uncle's family came and apologized to her father and her father accepted this apology. He then told his daughter to apologize back to the man who had raped her. (Mapusaga o Aiga, "Women and Domestic Abuse" (Paper prepared for SAWG Conference, 2000).*

### For discussion:

1. What are various forms of violence you, personally, have encountered in your country, community, homes, workplaces, schools, etc?
2. Who/what were the perpetrators of the violence?
3. How might you help to overcome such forms of violence?
4. What would deter you from acting to combat violence?
5. What are your faith resources in such actions?

*If you are studying this material as a member of staff or as a student of a theological school, you should find Reading 11 of particular significance at this point. Read it now though you will want to refer to it again in Unit 4.*

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## UNIT 2: HUMAN RIGHTS AND VIOLENCE

**Psalm 82: 3-4** *Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*

### Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define ‘human rights’
- list examples of human rights
- explain how the concept of human rights laws developed
- describe the contents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and explain its purpose
- divide the various articles within the UDHR into specific categories of rights
- explain ‘human rights’ in terms of its biblical and theological foundations

**You should ask yourself to what extent your own country upholds the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and whether you yourself would act to help enforce them.**

## UNIT 2: HUMAN RIGHTS AND VIOLENCE

### 2.1 Introduction

This unit introduces participants to human rights concepts, terms, and definitions as a foundation to building their knowledge about human rights law and its application. It also brings into the discussion the contribution of biblical and theological understanding in relation to human rights.

### 2.2 Defining and Applying the Concepts of ‘Rights’ and ‘Human Rights’

#### What is a Right?

A “right” is a legally justified claim. The Law specifies acts that are:

- \* permitted
- \* forbidden OR
- \* required

Rights cannot be “given” or arbitrarily (randomly or on a whim) taken away. (It is vital to stress that some rights can be limited and denied but only under strict and exceptional circumstances as set down by law).

- Both individuals and collective groups have rights.
- Often, the denial of a group’s right means that the individuals’ rights are restricted too.
- Rights can be “violated” or denied when society refuses to recognize or fulfill a claim on a right. For example, if people with disabilities are not allowed to claim facilities to affirm their right to live, to participate in social-cultural life and so on, then this denial of claims is tantamount to a denial of rights.
- A right cannot be used to stop someone else from exercising their right. It has been said that one person’s right is another person’s duty. This can be illustrated by saying: “*Your right to swing your arm ends just where the other person’s nose begins.*”

*(Adapted from RRRT: Regional Rights Resource Team, Pacific Human Rights Training Manual, August 2002)*

### What does ‘respect for a right’ mean?

- To respect the rights of another person is to value that person’s humanity rather than personality.
- It means treating others with respect regardless of your opinions about their race or beliefs.

Respecting human rights involves “A conscious effort to find our common essence beyond our apparent divisions, our temporary differences, our ideological and cultural barriers”. (*Boutrus Boutrus-Ghali, UN Secretary-General, in opening the World Conference on Human Rights 1993*)

*Max L. Stackhouse, in Reading 4 discusses the ancient roots of human rights. He claims that “decisive for all human rights thinking and action is the notion that there is a pattern of righteousness which can be known by humans in empirical life but which is not the same as empirical life”(Stackhouse, 31). What does Stackhouse mean by this statement?*

### What are ‘human rights’?

“Human rights are the rights and freedoms that allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents, and our conscience and to satisfy our spiritual and other needs. They belong to everyone and are the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” (*United Nations definition*).

- Human Rights are those rights that every human being possesses and is entitled to enjoy by virtue of their humanity.
- All humans are born with these rights, they cannot be taken away, or only given to some people. They are a natural part of being human.
- Human Rights are a legal claim because they are now a part of law in most Pacific islands countries’ constitutions and in international conventions, e.g. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- Human rights are based on the fundamental principle that all people have an inherent (i.e. are born with) human dignity and that regardless of sex, race, colour, language, national origin, age, class, or religious beliefs, they are equally entitled to enjoy their rights.

*(Adapted from RRRT Human Rights Training Manual)*

***Reading 5 states the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR)***

***List some of these rights. Which rights are violated through violence against women?***

**Who has these rights?**

We all have these human rights, you and I and everyone else – they belong to every human being. They are UNIVERSAL: male and female, rich and poor, black and white, religious and non-religious. They belong to everyone EQUALLY  
(Adapted from RRRT Human Rights Training Manual).

**What are some examples of human rights?**

- right to equality and non-discrimination
- freedom of movement
- freedom of religion
- right to a nationality
- right to life
- right to a fair trial
- right to privacy
- right of peaceful assembly
- freedom of opinion and expression

(Adapted from RRRT Manual)

**Are rights a new idea for the Pacific?**

Human rights is not a new idea for the Pacific. When God created humanity, they were meant to be free and equal in dignity and rights, “So God created humankind in His/Her image, in the image of God he/she created them; male and female He/She created them” (Gen. 1:27).

- The fundamental principles of human rights can be found in virtually all cultures, religions and philosophical traditions. For example, Christianity talks of loving your neighbour as you love yourself (Adapted from RRRT Human Rights Training Manual).

**Do we have to do anything in return for these rights?**

- Rights are not ‘earned’ but are owned by every human being, regardless of their position or wealth etc. However, as well as outlining the rights of citizens, some States also outline the “duties” and responsibilities of citizens towards the state and other citizens.

(Adapted from RRRT Human Rights Training Manual)

## 2.3 Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Human Rights

The deepest roots of human rights are found in the biblical conception of life. The words “human rights” do not, to be sure, appear in the Bible, but the themes that provide the basis of human rights do (Max L. Stackhouse, 1984:31.)

The Christian Churches have for decades promoted human rights. The Bible speaks about God’s concern for people’s rights. (Job36:5-6; Ps82:3-4; Prov.31:4-5;8-9; Eccl.5-8; Isa.10:1-2; Jer5:27-28; Lam3:35; and Exod.21:9-10).

Believers are instructed to “defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov.31;8-9). Yet Christians recognize that the deepest human needs – for grace, forgiveness and fellowship with God and with others, must be received as gifts, not demanded as rights.

In relationship to God, human rights too are gifts. But in relationship to organized society, the essential requirements for safeguarding dignity and justice must not be viewed as gifts. They are rights of persons the state is bound to respect and ensure. Within civil, political, economic, social and cultural arenas, human rights identify the prerequisites for a life of dignity, community participation and freedom.

According to the biblical view, humans are free in the sense that we can and must make choices, but we are not free to do whatever we wish (Stackhouse, 32). This applies to any situation where humans are violated because human rights are used to dominate or oppress others.

***In Reading 3, Shamima Ali accuses the church of neglect in respect of some human rights.***

***What are the rights that Shamima Ali identifies particularly in this respect?***

***Readings 6 focuses on women’s human rights. What are these rights?***

***Why is there a specific focus on women’s human rights?***

### **Case study**

Police is investigating an incident involving two church ministers who are alleged to have sexually harassed female students, and senior members of the Methodist Church in Fiji could face charges of being accessories to the crime because they failed to report the matter to police

(Sunday Sun, 17 September 2006).

## **2.4 In what Ways are Human Rights ‘Christian’?**

“On the ground of the creation of man and woman in the image of God, on the ground of the incarnation of God for the reconciliation of the world, and on the ground of the coming of the kingdom of God as the consummation of history, the concern that is entrusted to Christian theology is one for the humanity of persons as well as for their ongoing rights and duties” (*Adapted from WARC Website, 1980*).

“[Human rights] reflect the covenant of God's faithfulness to his people and the glory of his love for the church and the world. No earthly authority can legitimately deny or suspend the right and dignity of being human. It is in the light of this covenant as fulfilled in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit outpoured upon all flesh that Christians express solidarity with all those who bear a human countenance, and more particularly, a willingness to stand up for those whose fundamental rights and freedom are robbed” (*Adapted from WARC Website, 1980*).

The World Council of Churches at its first assembly in 1948 proclaimed the responsibility of churches to “take a firm and vigorous stand” against “flagrant violations of human rights”. International bodies of Reformed, Lutheran and Baptist churches as well as regional and national church bodies, have issued studies and statements on international human rights. The historic peace churches have been human rights advocates throughout the world on behalf of child soldiers, conscientious objections to military service, indigenous communities, and other concerns. Christians in general have affirmed the same catalogue of rights codified in the Universal Declaration and Covenants.

Yet they have articulated a moral vision of human rights in distinctively Christian ways, shaping the essential meaning of human rights on the basis of the key Christian narratives and convictions and how it relates to the values of dignity, community and freedom.

***Do all Christians tolerate faiths different from their own? Do some Christian sects/churches believe some others to be inferior? Is there a problem of reconciling the rights of the individual and the rights of society?***



### Case studies

A mother has five daughters, all are single. Three of them are illegitimate children. The youngest daughter is almost entering the workforce. The mother took her to the hospital. The daughter was surprised as to why they were going to the hospital. The mother took her to the family planning department. The mother wanted her to take family planning advice. The daughter yelled and said that she wanted be like her sisters. Whose rights are being violated?

~~~~~

A family, whose father is a priest, are expected to behave and dress in a certain way. One of the daughters is unwilling to dress conservatively and wants to go out and be like most of her peers, to explore life. The family has many arguments about what is expected of her, now and in the future. She says, "I am not a priest. I have to keep helping my mother serve when the visitors keep coming." Should her father force her to behave as he wants her to behave?

~~~~~

### For discussion

1. Define human rights – use words from your own language to help you.
2. What is the value of having the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)?
3. What are **the** three most important civil and political rights in the UDHR?
4. Identify three economic rights from within the UDHR.
5. Identify three cultural rights from within the UDHR.
6. Do you think that there are some rights missing from the UDHR? If so explain.
7. What is/are the biblical basis of human rights?
8. Is human rights a new idea for the Pacific?

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## **UNIT 3: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE BIBLE**

**Micah 6:8b** *And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

### **Learning Objectives**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify key biblical texts that have been used in justification and toleration of violence against women;
- challenge yourself and others to a new ecumenical and contextual understanding of these texts, and
- recognise and utilise tools to develop a new theological paradigm that sustains and nurtures “life” for men and women and children in Oceania.

**It is hoped that Unit 3 will cause you to evaluate critically your own knowledge of the Bible in the context of violence and your interpretation of that knowledge.**

## UNIT 3: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE BIBLE

### 3.1 Introduction

This unit examines texts that have been traditionally used to legitimate violence against women, and in particular, those texts used to develop and promote theologies of women's silence, submission and sacrificial suffering. The unit then explores hermeneutical questions of context and interpretation that arise in using such texts to support violence.

*Read Reading 7: "The Bible Story that Became a Campaign" NOW,  
Pages 91-100*

*Now answer for yourself the questions asked in the 'Campaign':*

- *What is the text about?*
- *Who are the male characters and what is the role of each of them in the rape of Tamar?*
- *What is Tamar's response throughout the story?*
- *Where is God in this story?*

*Now write down your own honest reactions to the story. What is your opinion of the behaviour of the men involved? What is your opinion of Tamar's behaviour? How could God allow this to happen?*

### 3.2 Violence in the Scriptures

Phyllis Trible identifies violence in her discussion of 'Texts of Terror' as a means of revealing the patriarchal and oppressive treatment of women in the scriptures. She began from the historical background of women in terms of the oppression and subordination they encountered, then moved on to a discussion of the patriarchal system in which the women existed (Phyllis Trible, 1984). By examining these two aspects, Trible then moved on to retell the stories from the often-neglected perspectives of women (Ann Loades, 1990, 28-9). For example, the story of the Unnamed Concubine in Judges 19. She was raped, murdered, and her body was cut into twelve pieces.

### 3.3 Textual Criticism and Theological Constructions:

#### Serving Violence or Peace?

Below are some texts for contemplation/discussion of their use in support of violence. Exegesis, hermeneutical questions and theological implications should be explored. A process of critical hermeneutical reflection and theological analysis is provided. Using two teaching sessions per week, the first session could be devoted to textual criticism and theological deconstruction, and the second to re-reading and the development of new theological implications and reconstructions. The number of texts examined in the study of the unit will depend on the amount of time available, but a minimum of three textual examinations each from both Old Testament and New Testament is recommended. A suggested list is provided below.

#### \* Old Testament texts (Hebrew Texts) and their theological implications:

Creation: Genesis 1& 2: theologies of submission and subordination versus partnership

\*Read Ess, Charles. "Reading Adam and Eve: Re-visions of the Myth of Woman's Subordination to Man" In Adams, Carol J & Marie M. Fortune (eds.) *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Source Book*. New York: Continuum, 1995.

Women to suffer as child bearers: Genesis: the role of and place of women (Genesis 3) Reading with new lens.

\*Read Mananzan, Sr Mary John. "Theological Reflections on Violence against Women" In *Challenges to the Inner Room*. Manila: The Institute of Women's Studies, 1998.

The rape of Tamar: 2 Samuel 13ff

\*Read Cooper-White, Pamela. *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Churches Response*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

The rape and death of the concubine: Judges 19:11-30

\*Read Fortune, Marie M. *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983.

Susannah & the church elders: (Apocrypha)

\*Read Fortune, Marie M. *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983.

If we are concerned with violence against women, we must carefully consider the story of Eve in Genesis 2-3. This story - more precisely, a later, especially Christian interpretation of this story - establishes an image of woman which mythically justifies male violence against her. To attack the problem of violence against women requires us

to attack the mythic justification of such violence (Carol J. Adams & Marie M. Fortune, 1995:92).

**Read Reading 8 pages 101 to 105. Give two(2) examples of writings that contribute to the repression of women in biblical texts.**

**\* New Testament texts (Christian Texts) and their theological implications:**

Ephesians 5:21-6.9 & the Pauline household Codes: trapped in abusive relationships: teachings against divorce --advantages and disadvantages

\*Read Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schussler. "Liberation, Unity and Equality in Community: A New Testament Case Study" In *Beyond Unity in Tension: Unity, Renewal and the Community of Men and Women*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988.

Forgiveness and love: Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 17: 3-4.

\*Read Frederick W. Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament" In Adams, Carol J. & Marie M. Fortune (eds.) *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Source Book* New York: Continuum, 1995.

Redemptive suffering & resurrection (Theology of the cross/the women caught in adultery/the Samaritan woman/ new life)

\*Read Catherine Clark Kroeger, "Let's look again at the Biblical Concept of Submission" In Adams, Carol J. & Marie M. Fortune (eds.) *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Source Book*. New York: Continuum, 1995.

There is no division in Christ: Galatia

\*Read Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schussler. "Liberation, Unity and Equality in Community: A New Testament Case Study" In *Beyond Unity in Tension: Unity, Renewal and the Community of Men and Women*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988.

Jesus' teaching on 'lust' : Matthew 5:28

\*Read Fortune, Marie M. *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983.

### 3.4 A Process for Critical Textual Critique and Theological Analysis

**Reading 9**, Select one text from the list above, **on Page 38** and use the critical process to provide a liberating biblical and theological exegesis of the text.

#### Step one:

Recount how the text has been used to support violence against women.

What 'lens' has been brought to the text to find such a reading?

What sociological and ideological conditions have been brought to bear on the reading of this text?

What theology has arisen out of such readings? (Theology of suffering and powerlessness of women? Theology of hope and salvation?)

What have been the implications of such theology for the women of your church and community?

#### Step two:

Re-reading the text, undertake an exercise in exegesis that unearths new readings of the text unavailable through the lens of patriarchy.

Examine how this text reads in relation to the overall biblical witness to salvation?

What does the text say about human nature and human relationships?

Are there signs of hope that are embedded in this text? What are they?

#### Step Three:

What alternative theological assumptions can be understood in this re-reading of the text?

How does this theology relate to the overall biblical witness to God's salvation plan?

#### Step four:

What implications does this new theology have for your social context?

Try to identify signs of hope from the re-reading of the text for your own context.

#### For discussion

1. "Wives should submit to their husbands in everything"(Eph. 5:24). Discuss ways in which this text is often misused.
2. Compare the 'Rape of Tamar' to the story of the 'Samaritan woman'. What are the roles of each of the characters?

3. From the readings assigned to this unit and your own personal reflection on the issue of violence against women in the Bible and theological writings, identify the main factors that encourage violence against women.

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## **UNIT 4: THE CHURCH AND ITS ROLE IN OVERCOMING VIOLENCE**

**Deut.6: 4-6** *Hear; O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.*

### **Learning Objectives**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- provide Biblical examples of overcoming violence;
- explain what the role of the church should be in overcoming violence;
- demonstrate practical skills to use in the effort to overcome violence.

**What arguments would you employ to combat the statement, “The Bible is full of examples of ungodly violence”?**

## UNIT 4: THE CHURCH AND ITS ROLE IN OVERCOMING VIOLENCE

### 4.1 Introduction

This unit examines the role of the church in overcoming violence against women. It brings on board the biblical stories and experiences that bring about peace in human relationships. These stories and experiences vary according to contexts, cultures and situations. This unit also offers practical ways to overcoming violence so that participants can see the whole initiative as a process of moving from being theoretical to being practical, and to becoming better equipped to use non-violent behaviour.

***Reading 10, Read Aruna Gnanadason, No Longer A Secret: The Church and Violence against Women, pages 113 to 123. Examine some of the church responses to VAW. Is this a reality in your church?***

In Pacific societies, the church plays a vital role in people's search for meaning. It is through the church that individuals in society achieve a sense of common purpose that goes beyond the conflict of individual interests. In this sense, the church can become a means of social control. For example, the images of women which express an identity with evil (or the devil), their dependence on the male and their passivity, are often supported by the biblical stories as mentioned in Unit 3. The church also tends to avoid addressing issues of justice by legitimizing the suffering of women as part of sharing in the divine sufferings of Christ. So what is the role of the church and religion in the issue of violence against women and children?

### 4.2 The Redemptive and Prophetic Role of the Church.

According to Kevin Barr, the church is the conscience of society, and today society needs a conscience. Unfortunately, the church is not the conscience we need to liberate society, as she is often seen to be allowing some forms of violence against women. The church's teachings and practices about keeping women in submission encourage men's feeling of supremacy over women. This exacerbates the church's poor recognition and acceptance of women's gifts and potential.

Violence has affected both pastors' families and laity. Current statistics indicate the severity of the various forms of violence against women, and the dangers inherent in women making an idol out of self-sacrifice and passivity. There are cases where women

endure violence in order to maintain economic and family stability. Within the church a clergy's spouse would continue being silent in the face of violence to uphold the image of being her family's 'living sacrifice' to God.

Often the first point of contact for women who encounter violence is the church, and for many, the response is that they are to forgive and forget and that it is part of married life. "Given that the churches play such a crucial role in the lives of the Pacific people, it is important that theological institutions prepare the priests, pastors and other religious persons with skills to deal effectively with members of the congregation should the need arise" (E. Kotoisuva, 2003).

Even though the existence of violence is now publicly acknowledged in the Pacific, still there is much denial from the church. A culture of silence is maintained in order to protect the sanctity of the body of Christ at the expense of women and children who are continuously affected by violence.

### **An example of violence in church and theological institutions**

#### **Case 1: Physical Abuse – A Husband's Duty**

*When X did not appear in morning chapel and was not seen outside her flat for several days, people on campus began to wonder what had happened. X was one of the student wives who had been beaten by her husband (already an ordained minister) several times before, and when this happened she always stayed in hiding until her facial bruises faded. Finally, the one female faculty member on the staff, suspicious of the possibility of another beating, decided to confront the woman's husband directly. When she pressed him about why his wife had not been out of their flat for days, he finally admitted that she was nursing bruises. But he defended his action, saying "it was my duty as her husband to teach her a lesson. We had guests for dinner (the night the latest beating happened), and she talked too much, even disagreeing with me in front of our guests. It was my Christian duty to teach her to behave as a proper wife and not embarrass me" (Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono, 2003: 125).*

Churches and theological institutions need to address the importance of liberating cultures, beliefs, theologies and interpretations of scriptures. "The central concepts must also be examined, including the need to view violence as a public, not private issue; to explore the root causes, not symptoms of violence only; and to develop action strategies with all stakeholders to avoid duplication of efforts and resources. (UNIFEM, 2003)

Moreover, churches and societies must do away with unjust structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression of women at all levels. They need to lobby for policy and legislation changes as imperative components for concrete actions. Thus, a collaborative effort between social institutions is imperative to effect change in attitudes that violate the integrity and dignity of women. More importantly, we need to reclaim the paradise lost through violence.

The church has an imperative and prophetic role in breaking the silence on the issue of violence. Breaking the silence means to speak openly about violence, naming it for what it is and naming it as a sin before God. (Marie M. Fortune, 2002: 204)

Many of us who are called Christians, have a difficult time believing that violence does occur. The only time we are comfortable thinking about violence is when it happens to someone else. That is the suitable time for us to get involved and confront it. We suddenly become experts on violence and on what other people should do about it. Our denial and paralysis in the face of our own experience gets externalized. We solve the problems of others while denying our own. When our anger is externalised in this way; it is projected; what we cannot accept in our own past; we project to others (*Adapted from University of Alaska, Anchorage, Training Materials on Domestic Violence*).

The church as an institution and its people in ordained and lay ministry, must be prepared to respond to situations of violence. Marie Fortune, from her experience of dealing with family violence, claims that the prophetic role of the church includes not only breaking the silence on violence, but also providing education for prevention.

“By breaking silence and by taking the initiative in the development of prevention education at the local church level, ministers are announcing the good news that there is an alternative to the generational cycle of abuse in families. This self-consciously prophetic act is risky, but it is crucial in our time if we are to redeem life and restore it to a place of abundant care, respect, safety, and support for its members. (Fortune, 205)

**Reading 11,** Now read Joan A. Filemoni-Tofaeono’s “Cracking the Silence: The Churches Role in Violence Against Women in Oceania”, pages 124 to 136. Identify ways in which you can overcome violence within your own context/s in order to reflect the attributes of the church listed below.

### **The church as the agent of:**

#### **love-**

*1John 4: 20 “Those who say, I love God and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen.”*

## **hope**

*Is 55:11- “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purposed and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*

## **shalom (peace)**

*Shalom is a basic core belief around which many other important beliefs are organized. Shalom encapsulates God’s basic intention, God’s vision, for humankind. Consequently, we must understand salvation, atonement, forgiveness, and justice from their roots in shalom.*

## **justice**

*Micah 6:8 “He has told you oh mortal what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.”*

## **The church as the body of Christ**

Religious communities must make it known that violence of any form is violating the body of Christ. It is also violating the image of Christ in each one of us. The church must be the extension of God’s presence to those who are experiencing abuse. In addition to responding to individual crises, congregations have the responsibility to shape community norms for family life that would preclude control, coercion and violence (Faith Trust Institute, *Domestic Violence Study Guide*, 2002).

## **The role of the church in the light of the biblical stories in which violence is overcome:**

1. Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 2-4)
2. Abigail and David (1 Sam. 25)
3. Esther (Esther 2:8-23)
4. Samaritan Woman (Jn. 4:7-29)
5. Joseph and Mary (Matt. 1:18-25)
6. King Solomon and the two women (1Kgs.3:18-28)
7. The Story of Baby Moses (Exod. 2)

*Do you think that the strategies adopted by the South African ‘Tamar’ campaigners would be useful in your community? If so, what might you do to encourage such a campaign? If not, why not?*

### 4.3 Relevant Approaches the Church Could Use in Overcoming Violence

The issue of overcoming violence involves collaborative action and work among members of societies and churches. In fact, there are religious and contextual approaches to overcome violence. These models depend on the willingness and cooperation of those involved in the process. Approaches must be holistic in nature and in essence so that they reflect God's life-giving purpose for all of creation. The Church must live out the prophetic and shepherding role of the church which includes counseling, healing, nurturing, caring, fellowship, peace and reconciliation, etc. The main focus is to restore life and bring about justice. Howard Zehr discusses the importance of restorative justice:

*Restorative justice revolves around three concepts: harm, obligation, and engagement. It says what really matters about the wrongdoing is the harm that's been done. One goal is to meet the needs of those who have been harmed. The second goal is to hold people accountable to meet obligations. A third is to involve those impacted to the extent possible because being engaged is such an important part of the experience of justice. The goals are to meet victims' needs and the offenders' needs. (Christianity Today Magazine, April 2004)*

Restorative Justice is a biblically based view of criminal justice that attempts to engage victims, offenders and the affected communities in bringing about deep and lasting solutions by focusing on healing, restoration and the future. (Christian Reformed Churches in North America, 2006)

**Read pages 137 to 148 of Reading 12 and name four tasks that the church is called to do in dealing with violence against women.**

#### **Case study Two**

***A clergy couple was living at a theological institution that maintains a typical (for the region) hierarchical structure. The husband became a victim of this structure and its dirty politics. The ensuing stress affected the couple's relationship at home and their frustration was taken out on each other. One day their built-up frustrations culminated in a verbal argument that ended in a fist fight. The wife reported the incident to the Principal, who met with the couple privately. The couple was told to go home, reconcile and pray about their problem. As soon as the couple left, the Principal shared this confidential incident with his closest confidantes, who in turn spread the matter as a gossip to their colleagues, friends and students at the College. The news of the gossip got back to the couple who then regretted going to the Principal for pastoral support, as it became a source of destruction rather than an agent of healing for them (Joan A. Filemoni-Tofaeono, 2004).***

*Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi*

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred let me sow love;*

*where there is injury, pardon;*

*where there is discord, union;*

*where there is doubt, faith;*

*where there is despair, hope;*

*where there is darkness, light;*

*where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master,*

*grant that I may not so much seek to be*

*consoled as to console;*

*to be understood as to understand;*

*to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive;*

*it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;*

*and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

*Amen.*

**For discussion**

1. Read Case Study One and discuss what is happening.
2. Discuss how you would address such a situation.
3. Discuss how you would approach the issue raised in Case Study Two.
4. What is the present role of your church in overcoming violence against women?

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**THE CHURCH AND  
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**READINGS**

## **READING 1:**

Marie M. Fortune, "The Transformation of Suffering: A Biblical and Theological Perspective" In *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and other Helpers*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002. pp.243-50.

A religious person who is victimized by rape, battering, or child sexual abuse frequently faces the questions, 'Why do I suffer in this way?' and, 'Where is God in my suffering?' These profound theological questions cannot be answered simply with platitudes and then dismissed. The question of why there is suffering at all is one of classic theological debate, that is, the question of theodicy, to which there is no completely satisfactory answer. Human suffering in the midst of a world created by a compassionate and loving God is a dimension of human experience which is most disturbing and disquieting. The particular experience of suffering that accompanies victimization by sexual and domestic violence raises particular issues in regard to theodicy.

### **Why is there suffering?**

People struggle with two fundamental aspects of the experience of suffering when they ask, Why do I suffer? First is the question of cause, that is, the source of the suffering. The second aspect involves the meaning or purpose of suffering.

Why is there suffering? It suffices to say that some suffering results from arbitrary, accidental sources such as natural disasters. However, much suffering is caused by human sinfulness: sinful acts by some bring suffering to others. These acts can generally be understood as acts of injustice. God allows such sinfulness because God has given persons free will and does not intervene when they choose to engage in unrighteous, unjust acts. Other people suffer from the consequences of these acts. This explanation may be adequate for situations clearly caused by human negligence or meanness, intended or not: for example, a fatal car accident caused by a drunk driver, chronic brown lung disease in textile workers who are denied protection from occupational hazards, birth defects in families living near toxic waste dumps, or incestuous abuse inflicted by a father upon his children. Yet it is still not a wholly satisfactory explanation. Those who suffer search further for answers, or at least for someone to blame.

Victims of sexual or domestic violence have a strong tendency to hold God or themselves responsible for the abuse even though there is clearly a perpetrator whose actions resulted in the victim's suffering. While his/her sinful acts may be understood as a consequence of his/her own brokenness and alienation (sometimes rooted in his/her own victimization), he/she is nonetheless responsible for actions that bring suffering to others. Self-blame or God-blame for one's

experience of victimization simply avoids acknowledging that a particular person is responsible for the abusive acts.

Another explanation that is frequently utilized by victims is really old-fashioned superstition. It seeks to explain a current experience of suffering in terms of a previous "sinful" act on the part of the victim: the current suffering is God's punishment for the preceding "sin" which God has judged. Hence a battered woman now being abused by her husband can "explain" why this is happening by remembering that, when she was sixteen, she had sexual intercourse once with her boyfriend. She knows this was a "sin" and that God was displeased with her, so God must now be punishing her teenage indiscretion. Or she may have been "disobedient" and not submitted to her husband. She understands the situation to reflect God's acting to bring about her suffering for a justifiable reason; she blames herself and accepts her battering as God's will for her. At least she can "explain" why this happened to her; unfortunately, her explanation leaves no room for questioning her suffering or for confronting her abuser with his responsibility for it.

If God is to blame for the misfortune, one can direct anger at God for causing the suffering. For whatever reason, it is argued, God has singled out the victim of sexual or domestic violence to suffer. Two things result. First she/he is driven away from God by the pain and anger; second, no one is held accountable for what he/she has done to the victims. The suffering of the victim is exacerbated by the feeling that God has sent this affliction to her/him personally and has abandoned her/him in the midst of it. Harold Kushner offers a valuable reframing of this assumption:

We can maintain our own self-respect and sense of goodness without having to feel that God has judged us and condemned us. We can be angry at what has happened to us, without feeling that we are angry at God. More than that, we can recognize our anger at life's unfairness, our instinctive compassion at seeing people suffer, as coming from God who teaches us to be angry at injustice and to feel compassion for the afflicted. Instead of feeling that we are opposed to God, we can feel that our indignation is God's anger at unfairness working through us, that when we cry out, we are still on God's side, and He [sic] is still on ours.

God is not only *not* the cause of injustice and suffering but is instead the source of our righteous anger at the persons or circumstances that do cause suffering as well as our source of compassion for those who suffer.

The second aspect of the experience of suffering involves the attribution of meaning or purpose. What meaning does this experience of suffering hold for the victim? People have great difficulty accepting the irrational and often arbitrary nature of sexual and domestic violence. Instead of realizing that these things happen for no good reason, they attempt to manufacture a good reason or seek a greater good; for example, suffering "builds character" or is "a test of one's faith." The purpose of suffering is then the lesson it teaches, and the result should be a stronger

faith in God. Purposefulness somehow softens the pain of the suffering. If some greater good is salvaged, then perhaps the suffering was worth it.

An understanding of the meaning of one's suffering begins with the differentiation between voluntary and involuntary suffering. Voluntary suffering is a painful experience which a person chooses in order to accomplish a greater good. It is optional and is a part of a particular strategy toward a particular end. For example, the acts of civil disobedience by civil rights workers in the United States in the 1960s resulted in police brutality, imprisonment, and sometimes death for those activists. These consequences were unjustifiable but not unexpected. Yet people knowingly chose to endure this suffering in order to change the circumstances of racism, which caused even greater daily suffering for many. Jesus' crucifixion was an act of unjustifiable yet voluntary suffering; in 1 Peter it is viewed as an example:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

-1 Peter 2:21-23

But it is an example not of simply being a sacrificial doormat but of choosing, in the face of the violence of oppressive authority which threatened him, to suffer the consequences of his commitment. It was a witness to his love, not his suffering. Beverly Wildung Harrison further reframes Jesus' suffering on the cross:

But those who love justice, and have their passion lovingly shaped toward right relation act not because they are enamored of sacrifice. Rather, they are moved by a love strong enough to sustain their action for right relation, even unto death. . . . Jesus's paradigmatic role in the story of our salvation rests not in his willingness to sacrifice himself, but in his passionate love of right relations and his refusal to cease to embody the power-of-relation in the face of that which would thwart it. It was his refusal to desist from radical love, not a preoccupation with sacrifice, which makes his work irreplaceable.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus' crucifixion was the tragic consequence of his faithfulness and refusal to give up his commitment in the face of Roman oppression. He voluntarily accepted the consequence, just as did civil rights workers, in order to bring about a greater good.

Like voluntary suffering, involuntary suffering is unjustifiable under any circumstance. However, unlike voluntary suffering, involuntary suffering is not chosen and never serves a greater good; it is inflicted by a person(s) upon another against their will and results only in pain and destruction. Sexual and domestic violence are forms of involuntary suffering. Neither serves any useful purpose; neither is chosen by the victim; neither is ever justified. Yet both cause great suffering for large numbers of people.

Many victims of involuntary suffering respond with the question: Why did God send *me* this affliction? In the face of the personal crisis of violence, one's deepest need is to somehow explain this experience, to give it specific meaning in one's particular life. By doing this, victims

begin to regain some control over the situation and the crisis. If one can point accurately to the cause, perhaps she/he can avoid that circumstance in the future; if one can ascribe meaning, then she/he can give it purpose, can incorporate the experience more quickly and not feel so overwhelmed by it.

Neither superstition nor the search for a greater meaning necessarily encourages the victim of violence to deal with the actual source, that is, the abuser's behavior. Neither encourages the victim to question the abuse she/he is experiencing. Neither motivates the victim to act in seeking justice. Neither is theologically adequate for the person who is struggling to comprehend his/her experience of abuse in light of faith.

In Jesus' encounter with the man born blind (John 9:1-12), he is confronted with the question about the cause of suffering.<sup>3</sup> "His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" (v.2). Jesus answers their question in terms of the meaning rather than the cause of his suffering: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work." (vv.3-4).

Jesus proceeds to make a medicine and heal the man's blindness. He dismisses the request for a superstitious cause and restates the search for meaning. The blind man's suffering is a fact. Where is God in this suffering; what can God do in this situation; and what are we called to do? Jesus acts to relieve suffering rather than discuss its cause. He is teaching that the responsibility belongs to us to act regardless.<sup>4</sup> The question for us is not who sinned (in cosmic terms) or how can God allow women to be beaten and raped, but how can we allow this to go unchallenged? In challenging this victimization, the question is. Who is accountable for this suffering and how can justice be wrought here?

What Jesus does not address in this parable is the situation in which there is clear responsibility for the suffering of another. A more current reading of this story might include the information that the man's father beat his mother during her pregnancy with him, and the child's blindness resulted. In this case, when asked the question who sinned, Jesus might have said, "The one who beat his mother is accountable for his acts. Rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him. (See Luke 17: 1-4.) Here we must work the works of the one who sent me." Part of that work, which is clearly expected in the prophetic tradition of Hebrew and Christian theology, is that of calling to repentance and accountability and making justice in order to accomplish forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. These responses to experiences of suffering at the hands of another are requisite if the suffering is to be more than simply endured.

## **Endurance**

In both the explanation of superstition and the attribution of greater meaning, God is held responsible for the suffering itself. This presupposes a belief in God as omnipotent and omniscient. If God is in control and choosing to exercise that control by bringing suffering upon the afflicted as punishment or in order to teach them something, then both cause and meaning are clearly determined to be in God's hands.

In the face of this interpretive framework, most victims accept endurance as the means of dealing with this suffering. Deciding that being battered or molested is justifiable punishment, one's lot in life, cross to bear, or God's will, sets in motion a pattern of endurance that accepts victimization and seeks ways to coexist with it. Victims are encouraged to endure when support and advocacy to get away from the violence are not provided, when they are told to go home and keep praying, and when they are expected to keep the family together even though the violence continues and they are in danger. This "doormat theology" teaches that it is God's will that people suffer and the only option is to endure it. There is no space to question or challenge the suffering that comes from this injustice, to feel anger, or to act to change one's circumstance. The result of this theology is that a victim remains powerless and victimized and her/his physical, psychological, and spiritual survival are jeopardized. This understanding of the meaning of suffering comforts the comfortable and afflicts the afflicted but ignores the demands of a God who seeks justice and promises abundance of life.

There is no virtue in enduring suffering if no greater good is at stake. Certainly, being battered or sexually abused is such a situation. There *is no greater good* for anyone—certainly not for the victim and children and others who witness the violence but also not for the abuser. Endurance that merely accepts the violence ignores the abuser's sinfulness and denies him a chance for repentance and redemption which may come from holding him accountable for his acts. Endurance in order to "keep the family together" is a sham because the family is already broken apart by the abuse. There is no virtue to be gained in these situations where everyone loses; there is no virtue in encouraging a victim of abuse to accept and endure it.

### **Transformation**

For the Christian, the theology of the cross and the resurrection provides insight into the meaning of suffering and transformation. God did not send Jesus to the cross as a test of his faith, as punishment for his sin, or to build his character. The Romans crucified Jesus and made him a victim of overt and deadly anti-Semitic violence. It was a devastating experience for Jesus's followers who watched him murdered. They were overwhelmed by fear, despair, and meaninglessness. They left the scene of the crucifixion feeling abandoned and betrayed by God. The resurrection and subsequent events were the surprising realization that in the midst of profound suffering, God is present and new life is possible.

This retrospective realization in no way justified the suffering; it transformed it. It presented the possibility of new life coming forth from the pain of suffering. Sometimes Jesus's crucifixion is misinterpreted as being the model for suffering: since Jesus went to the cross, persons should bear their own crosses of irrational violence (for example, rape) without complaint. But Jesus's crucifixion does not sanctify suffering. It remains a witness to the horror of violence done to another and an identification with the suffering that people experience. It is not a model of how suffering should be borne but a witness to God's desire that no one should have to suffer such violence again. The resurrection, the realization that the Christ was present to the

disciples and is present to us, transformed but never justified the suffering and death experience. The people were set free from the pain of that experience to realize the newness of life among them in spite of suffering.

Personal violence presents a victim with two options: endurance and acceptance of continued suffering, or an occasion for transformation. Endurance means remaining a victim; transformation means becoming a survivor.

In order to become a survivor and transform one's suffering, persons must use their strength and all available resources within themselves and from others to move away from a situation in which violence continues unabated. God is present in this movement as a means to transform. A young woman, raped at age eighteen, reflect on her rape experience in light of her faith. As she recovered she observed that her prayer life had shifted dramatically after the assault. Prior to the rape, she recalled that her prayers most often took the form of "Dear God, please take care of me." As she recovered from the rape, she realized that now her prayers began, "Dear God, please help me to remember what I have learned." She moved from a passive, powerless position of victim in which she expected God to protect her to a more mature and confident position of survivor in which she recognized her own strength and responsibility to care for herself with God's help. In addition, her compassion and empathy for others increased and she was empowered to act to change things that cause violence and suffering. She was able to transform her experience and mature in her faith as she recovered from the assault with the support of family and friends.

One of the most profound fears experienced by one who suffers is that God is literally abandoning her/him. The experience of suffering and the resulting righteous anger in the face of that suffering need not separate us from God. Paul gives witness to this in Romans.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38)

God is not responsible for suffering; God is not pleased by people's suffering; God suffers with us and is present to us in the midst of the pain of sexual and domestic violence; God does not abandon us even though everyone else may. This is the promise of the Hebrew and Christian texts—that God is present in the midst of suffering and that God gives us the strength and courage to resist injustice and to transform suffering.

Just as God does not will people to suffer, God does not send suffering in order that people have an occasion for transformation. It is a fact of life that people do suffer. The real question is not. Why? but, What do people do with that suffering? Transformation is the alternative to endurance and passivity. It is grounded in the conviction of hope and empowered by a passion for justice in the face of injustice. It is the faith that the way things are is not the way things have to be. It is a trust in righteous anger in the face of evil which pushes people to action. Transformation is the means by which, refusing to accept injustice and refusing to assist its

victims to endure suffering any longer, people act. We celebrate small victories, we chip away at oppressive attitudes cast in concrete, we say no in unexpected places, we speak boldly of things deemed secret and unmentionable, we stand with those who are trapped in victimization to support their journeys to safety and healing, and we break the cycle of violence we may have known in our own lives. By refusing to endure *evil* and by seeking to transform suffering, we are about God's work of making justice and healing brokenness.

## Notes

1. Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 45.
  2. Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 18-19.
  3. "It is assumed that sin, by whomsoever committed, was the cause of the blindness. This was the common belief in Judaism; see e.g., Shabbath 55a: There is no death without sin (proved by Ezek. 18:20) and no punishment (i.e., sufferings) without guilt (proved by Ps. 89:33). When a man has been blind from birth, the sin must be sought either in the man's parents, or in his own ante-natal existence" (C.K.Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* [London: SPCK, 1955], 294).
  4. In light of the Holocaust some have asked, Where was God? and many Jews have reframed the question to. Where were the people who could have stopped this?
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## READING 2:

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, (FWCC) "Violence against Women in the Pacific" Adapted from FWCC Website 24 August 2005. pp. 1-7

*"If it were between countries, we'd call it a war. If it were a disease, we would call it an epidemic. If it were an oil spill, we'd call it a disaster, but it is happening to women and it is just an everyday affair.*

*It is sexual harassment at work and sexual abuse of the young. It is the beating or the blow that millions of women suffer each and every day. It is rape at home or on a date. It is murder."* Micheal Kaufman, co-founder of the Canadian White Ribbon Campaign .

Violence against women which includes domestic violence, sexual assault and the raping of women and children has for a long time been considered a private issue. It was only through the persistence of the women in the women's movement that issue has been brought to the fore. A decade or even up to five years ago, the issue of violence against women was very rarely discussed at regional or even at national level. As we talk about Beijing +10, violence against women is on everyone's agenda but I remember during regional and national preparations for the Beijing Conference, we had to fight to get the issue of violence against women on the agenda as an issue of concern for the Pacific or even for Fiji, and that was the attitude amongst women's groups and funding agencies.

Why was there a deathly silence on the issue of violence against women? It was and is because violence against women was a real demonstration of the gender inequalities that exist and to bring about positive changes for women and work towards the elimination of violence against women, one has to challenge the basic structures that exist in our society and in particular that which is reinforced by religious and cultural beliefs. Violence against women stems from the patriarchal structures which grant power to men to dominate women and keep them in place should they "step out of line". Further to this one has to look at the systems in place to protect women who are victims/ survivors.

Before going into the impact, I'd just like to give a bit of background on the context within the Pacific.

## **Pacific - Social, Economic, Political and Cultural Context**

The Fiji Poverty Report showed that 25 percent of households live below the poverty line in Fiji. The poorest households normally include those with low standards of education and skills and have difficulty finding employment. Two-thirds of poor households live in rural areas, a distribution that mirrors that of the national population. Indo-Fijians account for 54 percent of poor households, Fijians 42 percent and 4 percent other races.

Preliminary results from more recent research shows that the cost of living has risen by 40 - 45 percent while the mean wage rate has only increased by 28 percent over the same time period. This shows that the extent of poverty in Fiji has increased. Around 1 in 7 of the poorest households are headed by women. The majority of the recipients of Social Welfare's Family Assistance Scheme are female (around 71 percent).

Recent surveys have revealed large differences in income and well-being within many Pacific Islands countries. For example a series of household income and expenditure surveys in the Solomon Islands and Tarawa (Kiribati) revealed very marked inequalities in incomes. In Tarawa the report showed that only 16 percent of those surveyed had paid jobs.

Political and ethnic conflicts such as the coup in Fiji and the ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands disrupt all aspects of social and economic life. Civil society organisations such as FWCC, other women's organisations and NGOs have to work much harder to highlight human rights issues and abuses in a context where there is increased acceptance of violence at many levels and many instances of institutionalised racism. Issues concerning women and children become secondary to issues of national security. Police and the judiciary give a low priority to prosecuting cases of violence against women and children. Women's organisations may be accused of selfishness for continuing to pursue a women's rights agenda. At a practical level conflict slows down all work because travelling becomes dangerous particularly to rural areas.

After the coup in Fiji women faced many economic difficulties. According to research conducted by FWCC, 72 percent of women surveyed, who were in paid employment, either lost their jobs or had reduced working hours and pay cuts as a result of the coup. The number of households earning less than \$50 per week more than doubled after the coup.

Fiji's economy is still struggling to recover following the upheavals of 2000. A failure to resolve land ownership and tenancy issues undermine the agricultural economy and is resulting in

increasing internal migration from rural to urban areas. Political tension, instability and the potential for further conflict is part of the development context in Fiji and in some other Pacific countries. NGOs such as FWCC and women's groups in Bougainville have played a key role in supporting a return to the rule of law, and in promoting transparency and accountability in government agencies in times of political instability and conflict.

...crimes in 2001. In total, 439 sexual offences were reported to Police, a 14% increase from 2000. Over 96% of these offences were committed against females. Fiji Police Statistics also show that out of the total number of 9 murders committed within a domestic violence situation, 7 of the victims were women.'

Statistics from FWCC and the 3 branches show that 10,353 new clients and 11,978 repeat clients visited all centres from July 1999 to June 2004, in addition to 2,556 telephone counselling sessions. This includes 3,868 new cases of domestic violence and 543 new cases of sexual assault. Child abuse cases seen at FWCC and all 3 branches continue to increase with a total of 262 new clients seen for the same period.

Vanuatu Women's Centre's statistics show that a total of 2,026 new clients and 4,329 repeat clients were attended to from July 1999 to March 2003. A total of 4329 repeat clients visited the Vanuatu Women's Centre from July 1999 to March 2003. This figure excludes counselling conducted by phone. In Papua New Guinea, the Eastern Highlands Family Voice recorded a total of 833 clients from December 1999 to March 2003. There were a total of 349 domestic violence cases, 183 cases of child abuse and neglect, 240 cases of desertion and neglect, 14 cases of child custody and adoption, 10 cases of rape and sexual abuse, 1 case of incest and 35 other cases. The Samoa Family Health and Safety Survey showed that 37.6% of women had been physically abused while 18.6% were emotionally abused and 19.6% had been emotionally abused.

There is evidence from Bougainville, the Highlands of PNG, Solomon Islands and Fiji that sexual violence against women is used as a weapon of terrorism and war in ethnic and armed conflict. In addition, FWCC's research on the impact of the May 2000 coup in Fiji showed an increase in physical and verbal domestic abuse due to financial stress and a general disrespect for the law following the coup, in addition to other social and economic impacts and increased assaults by Police and Military.

## **Impacts of Violence on Women**

Violence Against Women is a Human Rights and Development Issue. Both the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) identify violence against women as a serious human rights issue which prevents women from exercising their full human rights, particularly:

- The right to liberty and security of the person
- The right to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- The right to the highest attainable standard of health.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action (from the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995)

... direct Governments and NGOs not to refer to any custom, tradition or religious consideration to condone or tolerate violence against women. This was also a recommendation made by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in her 2002 report.

Violence against women is a serious impediment to the participation of women in all aspects of development in Fiji and the Pacific region. Violence and the fear or threat of violence pervades all spheres of social, economic and political life. It prevents women from taking educational and employment opportunities, from being involved in public life and decision making, achieving equality and gaining their basic human rights.

There are substantial human resource costs associated with women being unable to participate fully in society, development and nation-building. Violence against women and children also incurs significant direct, indirect and opportunity costs to government, families and the community. The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji estimates that direct and indirect costs in Fiji amount to around \$300 million per year, which is equivalent to 7% of Gross Domestic Product. For example, the Government incurs health care costs, costs incurred in court, law enforcement costs, welfare payments and jail costs. In addition, families suffer loss of earnings, legal and medical costs. Employers have loss of productivity and loss of output when women are absent due to violence. All these costs affect the wider community and at the macro level, the whole nation.

Violence against women has profound mental, physical and reproductive health effects. Women subjected to violence suffer from low self-confidence, low self-esteem and have increased risk of depression, anxiety and suicide. These mental health factors also contribute to poor physical health generally, in addition to a range of physical injuries with both short-term and long-term chronic effects. In Fiji and other countries in the Pacific, some women see suicide as a means of escaping the violence in their lives. The Samoa Family Health and Safety Research found that 19% of women who had been abused in the previous 12 months had thought of suicide and 8.4% had attempted to commit suicide.

Violence against women can have significant detrimental effects on women's reproductive health. International studies confirm FWCC's research findings that many women are abused during pregnancy (42% of those hit), with serious impacts on the mother and foetus including miscarriage. Most of these women were hit for refusing to have sex with their husbands. Violence against women can result in unintended pregnancies, repeated childbearing, STIs/HIV, gynaecological disorders, unsafe abortion and pelvic inflammatory disease. If their husbands are also having extra-marital affairs, as we often experience with the clients who come to FWCC and similarly in other countries of the Pacific - the women face an even greater risk of contracting STIs or even HIV/ AIDS. Some of our Network members in PNG are concerned about **virgins** as young as 13 or 14 are forced into marriages and are bound by the brideprice commitment – their tender age and vulnerability makes them even more susceptible to HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

In some cases, the violence ends only with the woman's life. In Fiji murders of women in domestic violence situations in the Western Division alone rose from 4 in 2002 to 12 in 2003. Children who are present in violent situations are at a higher risk of repeating the cycle of violence, in addition to the direct physical and mental anguish they suffer.

### **Poverty and Violence Against Women and Children**

The relationship between poverty and violence is not linear. However, it is clear that violence against women and children contributes to poverty in both direct and indirect ways. About 60% of FWCC's clients do not have formal employment. Women are under-represented in formal employment in most Pacific countries, due to discrimination and poor educational status, and a shortage of jobs in rural economies, so it is likely that the employment profile of women subjected to violence in Fiji is similar throughout the region. Women's lack of economic independence is one of a number of key factors that prevents them from leaving a violent relationship, whether or not welfare systems are in place. However, violence does often result in

separation or divorce. In countries where welfare payments are not available, this leaves women and children dependent on irregular family or child maintenance payments (because of a failure to implement maintenance laws by the Judiciary and Police); or on the generosity of relatives, who frequently do not support women in their decision to leave a violent partner. This applies across the region, whether or not separation requires the repayment of bride price. Where government or non-government welfare systems are in place, welfare payments are inadequate.

Many clients seen by FWCC feel they are unable to leave their relationships because of their children, as they are fully dependent on their husbands for financial support. If a client leaves, maintenance payments alone by the partner will not be enough to support the basic needs of the woman and the children due to the high cost of living. Some children become "street kids" as a means of escaping the violence and poverty in their homes. Similar trends are being experienced in other parts of the Pacific.

Violence results in physical injury and mental disability, which undermine women's ability to find work, and can result in women losing their jobs due to frequent absences and poor job performance. Women who have made the difficult decision to leave a violent partner are amongst some of the poorest in the community. They are often unable to provide for their children's education, which reinforces a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. Prostitution is a last resort for destitute women, and for street children who have suffered physical or emotional abuse in the family.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Simply looking at the impacts of violence against women presents a picture of doom - so what do we do? The amount of work that needs to be done is daunting but We have to get it right!- in terms of our approach and in terms of our programs. Of course, there are forces larger than we are, in terms of the systems in place, resource allocation, globalisation and regional and international conflicts. However, if we are conducting programs to address this issue, we have to target the root causes.

Violence against women is caused by inequality between men and women, specifically unequal power relations. This imbalance in gender power relations is long-standing, historical and embedded in key social institutions such as the family, the church, traditional culture and custom, the economy, the law and the political system.

In the Pacific there is an increasing number of programs which are attempting to address this issue, however many take on the approach of trying to "correct" the women's behaviour and actually make excuses for the violence. Any strategy that we adopt - whether we are dealing with the victim, the perpetrator or the system, we have to realise that we are challenging a system which does not "allow" women from realising their full human rights, and that is why we need to be consistent and never ever make excuses for the perpetration of this violation of women's human rights.

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### **READING 3**

Shamima Ali, "Violence in the Pacific: The Role of the Church" PCC Assembly, 6 March 1997, Tahiti. pp. 1-4

#### **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE PACIFIC THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH.**

PCC Assembly, 6 March 1997. Tahiti

Mr Chairman, members of the Church of the Pacific, on behalf of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, thank you for inviting me to address the issue of violence against women in the Pacific, and to state what support we want from the Church. This dialogue has been long overdue and my hope today is that this is the beginning of a new era for all of us - an era which recognises the oppressions women have suffered and one that recognises women's human rights and one in which we shall together work towards realising these rights.

I speak to you today as a woman of the Pacific, as a human being, as someone who has worked in the area of violence against women for the past 12 years in Fiji and parts of the Pacific and seen the destruction, the despair, the hopelessness and the extreme injustices suffered by women, children, families. I speak to you as someone who is appalled at the conspiracy of silence surrounding this issue, and the tacit justification for the existence of this violation by institutions such as the Church and other religious bodies, law enforcement agencies, the legal system, the medical profession and the State. So please forgive me if I offend anyone, because my intention is not in the least to do that but to break the silence and stop the everyday violation of women's human rights, and to be assured that the Church in the Pacific will be part of the healing process between men and women, and between women and society.

The Pacific is often described as "paradise" and gives a false notion of peace, justice, non-pollution but we are all well aware of all that which lies beneath paradise. We in the Pacific have a lot to be proud of but we also have a lot to be ashamed of-particularity in our treatment of our women.



## WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

There are various forms of violence - some are direct which we shall concern ourselves with, others take more indirect forms, or structural violence. Evidence shows, and some of us present here will testify to this, that where difficult choices have to be made between male and female children, the male is more often favoured: for food in times of scarcity, (or in our societies otherwise - who gets to eat the choicest morsels of food in a lot of households?); for education in almost all cases, where resources are limited, (even where resources are not limited - the state, the religious institutions **and** our homes - the patriarchal nature of all these institutions are guilty of this). Households with women as heads are the poorest of families - even though men are also poor, women are the poorest of the poor. Then there is also the assumption that when women are living with men, even though women have longer working hours, man is still the head of the household.

It is a fact that women all over the world have longer working hours than men. A woman has less leisure time than her husband. Think of all the women in our lives -think of all that they do - the double burden. If they have paid jobs, they also must complete their household chores. For rural women, the housework is coupled with plantation work, fishing, animals - have we ever stopped to think of the contribution these women are making to society - housework, outside work and not forgetting the community work. When we look into the internal distribution of money, food and decision-making power within families, within communities, we find a steady pattern of discrimination of women with very little differences between classes or between societies. For all **their** contribution, women receive the least attention in development plans, whether they be governmental or otherwise, and are hardly, if ever, consulted about their basic needs. Women industrial workers are often without protection and are paid the lowest wages by local and multinational industries which exploit their vulnerability. This is especially so in Fiji with its Free Trade Zones and other Pacific islands are rapidly catching up.

Women are among the many victims of nuclear testing, bearing the increased burden of miscarriages, jelly fish babies and cancers of various kinds. Our countries in the Pacific are getting rapidly militarised. Countries which are militarised show greater degrees of machoism, of male violence. And we must remember in any military confrontation it is the women who are the worst victims -they do not only get slaughtered but also get raped, suffer the consequences of childbirth, having to fend for families - a case in point is Bouganville. This form of violence is one illustration of domination of men over women.

Then there are more direct forms of violence. Violence occurs when one person assumes the right to dominate another and decides to use violence or abuse as a means of ensuring that domination. **Violent** behaviour involves assault, sexual abuse of women and children and economic, social and psychological and spiritual abuse. Even in our so called peaceful nations there is a war going on - and this war has to do with the violence stated above - a war waged against women everyday throughout the world in the form of wife beating, or euphemistically, "domestic violence", rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and against children as child sexual abuse.

Let us look at wife beating, or partner abuse. This includes both physical and psychological abuse; deprivation, and marital rape - yes. Rape within marriage is possible and happens a lot. There is an assumption that once a man marries a woman he has absolute control and right over her sexuality, her body. A recent Western Samoan survey by Mapusaga O Aiga reveals that many women gave refusing to have sex with their partners as a reason for the beatings they received. Other countries in the Pacific show similar trends. Society does not wish to acknowledge the fact that women are beaten up by then: husbands who are supposed to be their protectors and providers, the men these women love.

Society also accepts wife abuse as "part of being married" or believes if a man beats his wife, "she probably deserves it". In Fiji, from the little data we have, we believe that 1 in 4 women live in regularly abusive relationships.

The Vanuatu Women's Counselling Centre data also indicates that 1 in 4 women suffer regular abuse at the hands of their partners. Research by Mapusaga O Aiga in Western Samoa indicates 50% of women suffer from partner abuse, **in** PNG 67% of wives report having experienced marital violence. Many women throughout the Pacific die or are maimed for life at the hands of the husbands. Yet very little is done to address this everyday gross violation of human rights.

Our society believes a lot in forgiveness and I know one of the main teachings of the church is forgiveness but I always remember what a young male theologian told the PCC/WCC Women's Consultation in Apia a year ago. He said that when a person forgives the forgiven must truly repent.

Within the cycle of domestic violence forgiveness occurs over and over again, but there is no true repentance. For the cycle to break, the forgiver decides to leave the relationship. For those

of us who want to save families from the effects of violence it is imperative to understand the cycle of violence - why it happens, the dynamics, the myths surrounding it and constructive and meaningful solutions.

Sexual assaults and rape are any unwanted sexual contact or sexual contact without consent. Many men still believe that they have unlimited sexual access to their wives, partners, or any woman. Society still believes that women ask for, or invite this degrading and humiliating treatment from men. Our laws and other institutions are a reflection of these beliefs. For example, a young woman who had been raped first went to the church for healing and was further traumatised when told that she had the devil in her and needed to pray to exorcise the devil. Children of both sexes are no exception to this sort of behaviour from adults. Data from the Pacific programs against violence indicate that most abused children are females and most abusers are males - and males who are known to the children - fathers, stepfathers, uncles, teachers, neighbours, cousins, priests.

Sexual harassment is another form of abuse women suffer - the streets, in the workplace, at religious gatherings. This abuse is offensive behaviour with sexual innuendoes and is quite common. This can also take the form of lack of opportunities in various fields because of one's gender. The effects of violence against women is tremendously destructive. One half of the human population is held in subjugation through the fear of violence.

Violence against women is a human rights issue and is rapidly being recognised as such by international human rights organisations like the United Nations.

Violence against women is a development issue. VAW deprives society of women's full participation of women in all aspects of development.

It impedes women becoming full citizens of a country; it impedes her own personal development; it impedes her contribution to the community, to society and to national development. For example, in addition to structural impediments mentioned earlier, women cannot fully participate in decision-making processes for the fear of reprisals in their own homes from their husbands; women have education and careers cut short because of the control of their husbands; a constantly battered woman cannot contribute to community or national development; her productivity is minimized.

How can women look after their families welfare when they are spiritually so broken; how can they attend meetings, go to the gardens, sell their produce on the roadside, if they are constantly living in fear of being battered or sexually assaulted? These are the conditions under which a lot of Pacific women live – these issues have been gleaned from the stories of Pacific women.

## READING 4

Max L. Stackhouse, "The Roots of Human Rights" in *Creeeds, Society, and Human Rights*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1984. pp.31-38.

### B. THE ANCIENT ROOTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IDEAS

Does this cluster of assumptions derive from the American Constitution and the United Nations? Clearly not. These are but latter-day formulations. The sources are much deeper, and failure to see the roots is to live in a myopic world of immediacy. If this were the case, human rights could be altered by holding a new constitutional convention or by calling for a new vote in the United Nations. If we are to speak of human rights, we need to seek the foundations on which they rest. In this chapter we shall see that the roots of human rights as understood by the West and represented in the joint letter discussed above derive from nowhere else than from one stream of Christian thought as this thought has interacted with certain other themes in Western thought and social experience. (Aspects of this background also have informed the basic understandings of Eastern European definitions of human rights and are analogous to Indian ones, as we shall see later in this study.)

The deepest roots of human rights are found in the biblical conception of life. The words "human rights" do not, to be sure, appear in the Bible, but the themes that provide the basis of human rights do. It is important for our purposes to attempt to grasp certain of these themes in their most general terms. Decisive for all human rights thinking and action is the notion that there is a pattern of righteousness which can be known by humans in empirical life but which is not the same as empirical life. A reality directly related to daily living, to human meaning, and to social relationship, is nevertheless **not** the same as what can be found at all points in life. This reality, which we call "God," is not in the biblical view a figment of our imagination, a projection of our needs, or a product of human creativity. Nor is it an eternal part of ourselves. It is "other" than we are; we live *under* it. It is the source and the norm of all that is, a living reality in itself, yet not identical with the sum total of everything that we can find as we look around in the world. Humans stand, and must stand, under this reality -whether we want to or not, whether we are aware of it or not.

According to the biblical view, humans are free in the sense that we can and must make choices, but we are not free to do whatever we wish. We have the most profound aspects of human identity *conferred* upon us in love by a reality beyond us.<sup>4</sup> To that we *must* be faithful—not in the sense that we are, as puppets, manipulated to, but that we ought to, if we are to be truly

human. There is an "otherness" about this reality which is more real than our own desires and fulfillments, or even our souls. Yet the otherness is not entirely removed from us. Humans—all humans—are made in the image of this otherness. That which is beyond is also present; it can be known and seen in decisive aspects of creation and in human historical experience, providing hints, clues, directions, and guidelines as to how the otherness is simultaneously "present," giving guidance to freedom -without destroying the capacity for or necessity of choice. Failure to attend to these present aspects of otherness induces chaos, pretense, oppression, and destruction. The distance between God and humanity is commonly called "sin"; the presence is commonly called "revelation" or, simply "grace." Those who know the difference are called into "covenants" to discern, celebrate, enact, bear witness to, and live out the ethical implications of the difference. Indeed, the first marks of those who know the difference is that they live under a sense of moral law grounded in God's righteousness, not their own. They are liberated by the vision of God's righteousness to reform themselves and the society around them, but in their liberation they are called into a new voluntary discipline and responsibility to God and neighbor. They are a "covenanted people." In the ancient Hebraic encounters with the presence of this otherness, moral law and expectant hope, religious depth and social renewal are thus intimately tied together.<sup>5</sup>

For ancient Israel, such a perspective had immediate consequences. Because the Hebrew people were the first to clearly articulate this perspective, they had a dramatic sense of its specialty. It was not the perspective of the groups they encountered around them, many of which had similar or superior experiences of the environment, of techniques for social organization, and of changing fortunes amid contending empires. Yet the Hebrews felt that they had somehow come in contact with that which was in fact really real. They subjected their social, political, and economic experiences, and even their view of nature and its laws, to the scrutiny of this decisive perspective. It altered their way of life. It forced them to reassess their social structure and to develop basic principles for social life which assured, relative to the other peoples they knew, a sense of universal justice and historical expectancy which influenced every aspect of life. Richard Deats put it this way:

The universal implications of this faith in the righteous God, creator of the earth and of all living things, continued to permeate the life of Israel, expanding their faith to widening horizons of inclusiveness and compassion. "Am I my brother's keeper?" and "Who is my neighbor?" are questions that never ceased to stir the conscience of the people of God. . . . Isaiah especially caught the universality of this faith that is a "light for all the peoples;" "all flesh" will see the glory of the Lord.<sup>6</sup>

The Hebrews saw that the perspective which developed in their midst had implications for all humans everywhere—even for those who thought such notions strange. Hence they were able to

draw from surrounding cultures those features of societal law and those tendencies toward the new future which were compatible with their basic sense of what was really real.

At times, however, the special character of their perspective made them close in upon themselves, to see this fresh perspective as leading not to a special obligation to be "a light to the nations" but to special privilege. "Covenant" became an attempt to gain superiority, not an occasion to be a servant of the deepest vision. The Hebrews attempted to organize all of life in one structure under this decisive perspective. In spite of the constant resistance to Baal worship with its accent on sexual fertility, and in spite of the deep memories of the dangers of the sacred kingship of Pharaoh in the "flesh pots of Egypt," religion became identified on the one hand with family-based ethnicity and on the other hand with political authority. The "otherness" was obscured by the attempts to totally institutionalize, even domesticate, the "presence." Familial loyalties or political interests prevented closest adherence to the deepest insights they had received. In the cities taken over from the Canaanites, the loss of perspective seemed acute, but in these same cities a pluralism and a complexity allowed the thinking of new thoughts and the re-examination of old ones. Wherever the social situation opened up to provide space for the recovery of the central ' perspectives, prophets rose up to call the people once more to their basic perspective and to rearticulate, in view of new and changing conditions, what the moral law and the expectant hope meant. In these prophets we can see the reaffirmation of covenantal concerns, the ancient creedal foundations of human rights: there is a universal moral order, rooted in the righteousness of God, which is other than ordinary experience yet directly pertinent to ordinary experience; and human responsibility involves action toward the future which can reconcile the contradictions without dissolving the difference between the otherness of God and human reality. Further, in cities which witnessed the rise of prophets, we find the first glimmerings of a "social space" from which they were able to oppose false loyalties to both familial-ethnic solidarities and political-economic opportunism. They critiqued efforts to unite ethnicity covenantal religion, and political power into a single web; they demanded that the people distinguish among them. Nathan critiqued the sexual and military actions of David; Amos attacked the political arrogance of Israel and Judah; Hosea adapted antifamilial images to speak of God's faithfulness in covenant. The most important natural human associations, familial and political, were placed *under* a higher law and seen as subject to change in view of the covenantal commitments. A godly future, a truly humane future, depended on it.

In the short run, the prophets were not often successful. The loyalties to family and political community obscured the people's capacity to read the hints of God and to keep the universal notions of law and hope at the forefront, especially in periods of economic success. In time the society began to crack from within and succumb to assault from without. On several

occasions the people were driven into exile and diaspora or placed under the occupation of foreign invaders. Ancient Israel was destroyed as an ethnic, theocratic regime. Yet the power of the originating perspective did not collapse under these pressures, even if family institutions and political life were radically altered. The religious-moral dimensions of the tradition were renewed in a fresh way with the creation of Judaism.

The organizational base of Judaism was the synagogue, not the family or the nation or the ethnic state. It could not be the nation (political authority was in the hands of others), although the memory of the kingship and its closeness to the old temple kept nationalistic dreams alive—so much so that restoration of these became a part of the expectant hope. Nor could the organizational base be the family. Inter-marriage was a problem, and a single family, even if entirely Jewish, could scarcely withstand the impact of alien cultures. The synagogue, ambiguously divorced from the family by the subordination and exclusion of women yet encouraging ritual laws to guide all family practice, formed the substructural matrix for keeping alive the vision of law and the expectant hope. In the synagogue it was clear that the witnesses to a covenantal, moral law of universal import and those expecting a new order of mercy and love were of a kingdom that was "other" as well as "present."

It is in this context that Christianity arose. In Christianity many of the Hebraic perspectives were radicalized. Not a jot or a tittle of the fundamental moral law was to be compromised; indeed, the demands were intensified (Matt. 5ff.). In Jesus Christ, Christians saw fulfilled the promise of overcoming the tension between "otherness" and "presence." Ordinary life could be lived in terms of the ultimate source of righteousness. The hope for the future was confirmed by its first fruits. Both the law and hope were seen as manifestations of a love that surpassed ordinary comprehension. In Jesus Christ a new dignity was confirmed for all humans, a dignity which was not innately present or earned or constructed by human action, but sacrificially given. Grace overcame sin concretely in time and space. Henceforth all dimensions of spirituality, ideals, and universal moral principles must be discussed, discerned, and acted out in the context of historical interpretation and lived response. When Jesus said that God could raise up children of Abraham out of the very stones of the earth (Matt. 3:9), the connection between political and familial identity and the community of redemption was broken. Jesus went further: he relativized both familial and political power. When he said, "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother.... He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ..." (Matt. 10:35ff.), the power of familial and ethnic absolutism was compromised in a radical fashion. And when he told the people to "render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21), distinction between nationalism and religious tradition was, in principle, secured. From these moments on, Christians thought, people



had to live in the midst of pluralistic centers of identity and loyalty, constantly discerning where the core of divine presence was to be found. Family life and sexuality were affirmed, but not as central (1 Cor. 7); political power was validated, but not as the central matter (Rom. 13). Reconciliation with God meant structural diversities and distinctions in history that overturned simple visions of organic social consolidation. No family, no ethnic identity, no regime, and no political-economic order could serve as the fundamental basis for universal integration. The radical overcoming of sin by grace meant the denial of ultimate meaning in the sexual-genetic continuities of family, clan, and ethnic group on the one hand and in the power, responsibility, and glory of political governance on the other.

Because reconciliation was believed to have been accomplished for all, believers were driven by the very nature of their belief to take the Hebraic message to all peoples, to universalize the covenant to all who would live by its terms. The Jewish sense of being "special," of being a people "called out," was broadened to embrace all nations and families who would accept the new vision. Especially receptive were those who lived in the developing cities of the ancient world, those who, in terms of their own traditional cultures, were anything but special. The outcaste, the marginal, the dispossessed, those skeptical of the moral and metaphysical foundations of their own societies, those for whom the parochial loyalties to political deities and familial cults made no sense in the cosmopolitan Mediterranean world—these were the members of the renewed covenant, bearing the witness to and for all humanity.

Much has been written about the many aspects of early Christian development. It is clearly a mixed history marked by moments of confusion, falsehood, arbitrary authority, foolishness, failure, and irrelevance. Yet out of this ambiguity came several significant developments that were of historic importance for human rights. For our purposes, five points are the most important. First, Christianity held firmly to the Hebraic notion of a universal moral law rooted in the righteousness of God. Indeed, it radicalized the idea by claiming that it was no longer merely an objective, "other" law but was in principle written on the hearts of all people. Hence no one had an excuse, by claim of ignorance, when laws of justice were violated. Second, Christianity radicalized the sense of hope, for it felt that the future was already breaking in. Thus a certain kind of change in all areas of life, a change that did not violate the universal law but brought it to fruition, was to be the focus of discernment and activity in history. Change meant freedom from the unnecessary burdens of the past which kept people in bondage, but change also meant recovery and reaffirmation of what was of perennial weight from the past now lost to the present. In Jesus Christ the ancient hopes were reinvigorated; one could face the future with courage and find new meaning in the past. Tradition, when it portrays the law and the hope, must

be preserved, but the present patterns of life which do not contain these two things have no legitimate power over us. Therefore, we may expect a recreated future.

Third, the great Hebraic themes of law and hope were radicalized in a personal direction. Not only were peoples and classes, nations and families to be brought under the protection of a universal just law and into the courage of hope, but individuals were to have a place of dignity and respect. Because all are loved by God, each is a member of the human community under God. All other memberships are secondary. Each can claim from the neighbor a recognition, and each must render care for the other person—not only as a matter of law but because all are members of the same community. To violate the neighbor is to violate God's love for that neighbor and the basic community of life—whatever the status, gender, race, social worth, capacities, or idiosyncrasies of that person.

Fourth, the early Christians formed the church, based upon commitments of law, hope, and love. At first almost indistinguishable from the synagogues, the early churches were even more independent of political authority and familial-ethnic loyalties than the organizations of their Jewish brothers and sisters. Christians moved into the cities of the Mediterranean basin with the view that, through Jesus Christ, they were citizens of a universal community not yet recognized by the world. Under God they had a right to create new social bondings *not* based on family, ethnicity, or national power—bondings which preserved the moral law, renewed the hope, and expressed the delicate tissues of love more immediately than did all surrounding institutions. From the beginning, Christians believed in a community life which was to occupy and expand an **inviolable** social space for true freedom obtained in rigorous discipleship and discipline. These communities were the very "body of Christ," the place where a new spirit could manifest itself between master and slave, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and non-Jew. They had no small difficulty with such claims. They were misunderstood as licentious by outsiders who felt that if social conventions were broken, nothing would hold together, and they were tempted by licentiousness from within by those who felt that the new freedom and the atmosphere of love meant that all of the ancient moral law was passed. Others thought them so rigorous that they feared all the joy would be squeezed out of life if these people became numerous.

Over time this movement developed more articulate perspectives, and expressed a firm belief that neither familial (tribal-clan-ethnic) attachments nor political (city-state, national, or empire) memberships were or could be the basis for fundamental meaning or righteousness. Instead, they drew a circle at the very center of civilization and said that this "covenanted group,"<sup>7</sup> different from the ways of the world, was the group "who knew what was decisive for everyone else. In doing this, the church de-absolutized, relativized all other aspects and sectors

and perspectives of society. It thereby developed a particular affinity for cosmopolitan life which appeared again and again in the growing cities of the Mediterranean world.<sup>8</sup>

In the relativizing of surrounding institutions and perspectives, however, the alternatives were not negated. The family was maintained, and regular prayers for political authority were offered. Christians were enjoined to be obedient to the just demands of spouses, and to care for offspring and the unattached. They were instructed to be obedient to just political authority. Nevertheless, they pushed back and redefined the boundaries of family life, seeing the community of faith as the *genuine* and truly primary fellowship of brotherhood and sisterhood. While introducing a new level of mutuality and responsibility within the marital relationship, they challenged the cultural definitions of the absolute sacredness of family life and of primal responsibility to kith and kin.<sup>9</sup> Early Christians asserted what was viewed as scandalous then (and still is by many) when they suggested that virginity, celibacy, and continence were more holy than marriage. Sexuality is, surely, a natural law of human life. It also keeps alive the family tree and provides for future devotion to sacred genealogy. But early Christians saw it otherwise. It is always a temptation to particularist loyalty. They saw marriage, when it did occur, as an estate given by God (for those called to it) and legitimated not by the needs of the state or the family elders but by primary human needs, and approved by the more primary community, the church. In this subordinated position it was subject to universal principles. It was to be pursued with a sense of sacred responsibility, care-full responsiveness, and discipline; but it was not the center of meaning or the means of salvation, identity, or fulfillment. Children were not initiated into the family culms or dedicated to the gods of the state, but were baptized into the church, the true community of identity. Symbolically, God was the father, the church was the mother, and Jesus was the brother; the true family was not the sexual family. As this worked out, especially in the later monastic ideals when patriarchal structures threatened to swallow the church and the family, the social power of the empirical family was reduced and relativized further. Yet from these early Christian days onward, the family is affirmed and is to be constantly reformed *under* a notion of universal moral principles.

While this community of faith was displacing those social patterns which put the family at the center of life's meanings for most of the people, it also began a long and arduous struggle with political authority. The Creator, not the emperor, was the true lawgiver. Christ was king, and the Holy Spirit truly ruled. Christians were labeled subversive because they would not pledge primary loyalty to the political powers. Regime was not the center of meaning; *polis* was not the primary community; the lords of the realm could offer no fundamental security or salvation. Christians suffered martyrdom and persecution for their independence, gained a precarious toleration within a few centuries, but only belatedly obtained freedom from political

domination.<sup>10</sup> For them the true kingdom was not of this world. Again, to those then and now who see all meaning and historical significance in political terms, the early Christian assertion was, and remains, a scandal. But it was and is the comprehensiveness and the moral-spiritual competence of politics as a force able to produce a truly universal human life that are challenged.

## Notes

4. Hugh A. Koops, "Pressing the Claims, Interpreting the Cries," In A. O. Miller, ed. *A Christian Declaration on Human Rights* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 55ff. See also Walter Harrelson, *The Ten Commandments and Human Rights* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).
  5. See my "Reaffirmations," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 15 (Fall 1978), 662ff.
  6. Richard L. Deats, "Human Rights: An Historical and theological Perspective," *Engage/Social Action Forum*, No.38 (March 1978), pp.10f.
  7. At the time of the writing of the New Testament, the formation of independent groups outside family, political authority, or traditional ethnic groupings was illegal. Hence, so numerous biblical scholars tell us, the explicit references to "covenant theory" in the New Testament are muted, but the implicit references abound.
  8. Max Weber is surely correct in his claim that early Christianity was of the "congregational type of religion (and) has been intimately connected with the urban middle classes of both the upper and lower levels." It is related to "the recession in the importance of blood groupings," and the loss of confidence in imperial political power (*Economy and Society*, II, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich, New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 482.f.
  9. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, n.d.).
  10. C.M.Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944).
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## READING 5

United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. In Dale White, *Making a Just Peace: Human Rights & Dominations Systems*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998. pp. 155-58.

### The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

#### PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people, Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

**Now**, therefore,

#### THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

##### *proclaims*

**THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

#### **Article 1.**

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

#### **Article 2.**

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a

person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

**Article 3.**

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

**Article 4.**

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

**Article 5.**

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

**Article 6.**

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

**Article 7.**

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

**Article 8.**

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

**Article 9.**

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

**Article 10.**

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

**Article 11.**

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

**Article 12.**

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

**Article 13.**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his or her country.

**Article 14.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution
- (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**Article 15.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

**Article 16.**

- (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
- (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
- (3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

**Article 17.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

**Article 18.**

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

**Article 19.**

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

**Article 20.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

**Article 21.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
- (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

**Article 22.**

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

**Article 23.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
- (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

**Article 24.**

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

**Article 25.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
- (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

**Article 26.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
- (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

**Article 27.**

- (1) Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
- (2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

**Article 28.**

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

**Article 29.**

- (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
- (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.



(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**Article 30.**

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

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## READING 6

“Women’s Rights Are Human Rights” In *Lives Together, World Apart: Men and Women in a Time of Change*. UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund. pp. 47-52.

A series of human rights treaties and international conference agreements, forged over several decades by governments—conference agreements, forged over several decades by governments — increasingly influenced by a growing global movement for women's rights — provides a legal foundation for ending gender discrimination and gender-based rights violations. These agreements affirm that women and men have equal rights, and oblige states to take action against discriminatory practices.

The starting point is found in the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which all member states of the United Nations subscribe. Specific descriptions of rights and freedoms have been elaborated since these two instruments were written in the 1940s, but every subsequent human rights treaty has been rooted in the founders' explicit recognition of equal rights and fundamental freedoms for individual men and women, and their emphasis on protecting the basic dignity of the person.

As expressions of the world's conscience, the "consensus decisions of international conferences are also powerful instruments for promoting change both within countries and internationally. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) are international consensus agreements that strongly support gender equality and women's empowerment.

In particular, the ICPD and FWCW documents, drawing on human rights agreements, clearly articulate the concepts of sexual and reproductive rights — including the right to sexual and reproductive health; voluntary choice in marriage, sexual relations and child-bearing; freedom from sexual violence and coercion; and the right to privacy' — which are essential to gender equality.

### Human Rights Treaties

The Preamble of the United Nations Charter, adopted in 1945, reaffirms "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small". The Charter recognizes that one purpose of the United Nations is "to achieve international cooperation in ... promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion".

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted in 1948, further elaborated the scope of human rights. Article 1 summarizes all of the subsequent articles and succeeding treaties and conventions when it says, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." In some matters, such as marriage rights, the declaration goes into some detail in specifying the ways in which men and women should be treated. It specifies that "men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a

family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses."

More than 20 years after adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international community agreed on two covenants spelling out in more detail the rights embodied in the declaration. These were the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (often referred to as the political covenant) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (often referred to as the economic rights covenant). Both entered into effect in 1976. These are legally binding on states that have ratified them. However, many member states have not done so, and many others have done so only with substantial reservations. (States can make reservations to treaty articles that they do not wish to be bound by, as long as these are not contrary to the meaning of the treaty.)

Both covenants incorporated understandings based on the declaration, many of which have important implications with regard to gender and reproductive rights; these include the right of women to be free of all forms of discrimination, the right of freedom of assembly and association, and family rights. The political covenant, among other things, recognizes the rights to "liberty and security of the person" (Article 9) and "freedom of expression", including "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds" (Article 19); and affirms that "no marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses" (Article 23).

### **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 and had 165 states parties as of January 2000. The Convention seeks to address pervasive social, cultural and economic discrimination against women, declaring that states should endeavour to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct that stereotype either sex or put women in an inferior position. It also declares that states should ensure that women have equal rights in education and equal access to information; eliminate discrimination against women in access to health care; and end discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations. The Convention declares that states must act to eliminate violations of women's rights whether by private persons, groups or organizations.

The Convention sets clearer definitions and standards than the earlier covenants with respect to gender equality and expands the protections against discrimination. In particular, it recognizes that because socially defined gender roles differ, provisions against discrimination and abuse cannot simply require equal treatment of men and women; there must be a more positive definition of responsibilities that applies appropriate rights standards to all. The Convention recognizes the need to examine rules and practices concerning gender in society to make sure that they do not weaken rights guarantees ensuring the equality of the two sexes in all aspects of their lives.

Nearly all states have ratified the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, making it a strong tool for holding governments accountable on human rights issues. In addition to upholding specific rights of children, this Convention, adopted in 1989, deals more broadly with gender relations. It reaffirms, for example, the right to family planning services, recognized by prior conventions and conferences.

Article 24 obligates states "to ensure appropriate prenatal and post-natal health care for mothers". It also calls on them to take "all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children"; this is an explicit recognition of the deleterious effects of such practices as female genital mutilation. Article 34 says that states must "undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse". Article 17 states that the child should have access to information "aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health".

Applying the Convention, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has, for example: recommended that specific laws be enacted and enforced to prohibit FGM (1997); called on Kuwait to take action to prevent and combat early marriage (1998); and called on Mexico to raise and equalize the minimum legal ages for marriage of boys and girls (1999).

### **Human Rights Treaty Bodies: Reports and Recommendations**

Countries that have ratified human rights treaties are required to report regularly on actions they have undertaken to ensure the exercise and enjoyment of the specified rights. Established bodies monitor the implementation of rights instruments. For example, the Human Rights Committee monitors compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and receives complaints from individuals whose rights have been violated, while the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights monitors implementation of the economic rights covenant.

Treaty bodies offer recommendations and interpretations to assist in monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the international human rights treaties. Their recommendations can take several forms. Some clarify treaty provisions, for example, by specifying actions that states, groups or individuals should take. These monitoring bodies can also define standards and recommend actions needed to protect or expand a right. NGOs may also submit "shadow reports" when a state is before a treaty body.

The **Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** has issued a number of recent rulings on reproductive rights. For instance, it has called on Cameroon to eliminate the practices of polygamy, forced marriages and FGM, and bias in favour of the education of boys (1999); noted with concern the high incidence of pregnancies among females of school age in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (1997); and noted that Switzerland's Parliament had not yet recognized the right of pregnant women to maternity benefits as Article 10 requires (1998).

Concerned about the high number of suicides of adolescent girls, "which appear in part to be related to the prohibition of abortion," the **Human Rights Committee** called on Ecuador to help adolescents facing unwanted pregnancies to obtain adequate health care and education (1998). Regarding Poland, the committee voiced concern about: strict abortion laws leading to high numbers of unsafe clandestine abortions; limited access for women to affordable contraceptives; the elimination of sexual education from schools; and the insufficiency of public family planning programmes (1999).

In March 2000, the committee adopted a comprehensive new General Comment on gender equality, spelling out what Article 3 of the political covenant entails and what information states parties are expected to provide in their reports. It states that gender equality applies to the enjoyment of all rights — civil, cultural, economic, political and social — and is not merely a right to non-discrimination; affirmative action is required. States parties are obliged to prohibit

discrimination on grounds of-sex, and to "put an end to discriminatory actions both in the public and the private sector".

The **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women** monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At its January 1992 session, the committee adopted General Recommendation 19 on violence against women, which states that "gender-based violence which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms is discrimination" within the treaty's purview.

In 1994, the committee found that violence against women within families constituted a violation of the "right to non-discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations". It called for: criminal penalties and civil remedies in domestic violence cases; outlawing the "defence of family honour" as a justification for assault or murder; services to ensure the safety of victims of family violence; rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence; and support services for families where incest or sexual abuse had occurred.

The committee subsequently decried the high incidence of teenage pregnancy in Belize, which it linked to a lack of adequate family planning information and contraceptive use; it also expressed concern that schools are free to expel girls because of pregnancy, and that only a few allow girls to continue their education after pregnancy (1999). It ruled that in Chile, "deep-rooted social and cultural prejudices" hold back the achievement of equality for women; it expressed concern at high rates of teenage pregnancy, which it linked to sexual violence; and it urged the Government to revoke laws imposing criminal penalties on women who undergo abortions and requiring health professionals to report them (1999).

It urged Nepal to amend discriminatory laws on property and inheritance, marriage, nationality, birth registration and abortion; and to punish persons who procure women for prostitution or for trafficking; and it expressed concern about harmful traditional customs and practices, such as child marriage, dowry, polygamy, and ethnic and religious practices that force girls to become prostitutes (1999). The committee expressed concern about Peru's high incidence of domestic violence, including incest, and sexual violence against rural and indigenous women, including teenagers; it recommended that the Government review its law on abortion and ensure that women have access to **complete health services which include safe abortion and to emergency medical attention when complications arise from abortions (1998).**

## **BOX 28**

### **The Right to Reproductive Health Care**

*Access to health care, including reproductive health, is a basic right under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Article 12 requires states to eliminate discrimination in access to health services throughout the life cycle, particularly in the areas of family planning, pregnancy and confinement, and the post-natal period.*

*In 1999, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women elaborated a general recommendation on Article 12 of the Convention. Key points include:*

*"States parties should implement a comprehensive national strategy to promote women's health throughout their lifespan. This will include interventions aimed at both the prevention and treatment of diseases and conditions affecting women, as well as responding to violence against women, and will ensure universal access for all women to a full range of high-quality and affordable health care, including sexual and reproductive health services.*

*"States parties should allocate adequate budgetary, human and administrative resources to ensure that women's health receives a share of the overall health budget*

*comparable with that for men's health, taking into account their different health needs."*

*States parties to the Convention are urged, in particular, to:*

- *Place a gender perspective at the centre of all policies and programmes affecting women's health and involve women in planning, implementing and monitoring the provision of health services to women;*
- *Remove all barriers to women's access to health services, education and information, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health, and allocate resources for programmes to prevent and treat sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS among adolescents;*
- *"Prioritize the prevention of unwanted pregnancy through family planning and sex education and reduce maternal mortality rates through safe motherhood services and prenatal assistance. When possible, legislation criminalizing abortion should be amended, in order to withdraw punitive measures imposed on women who undergo abortion;*
- *"Monitor the provision of health services to women by public, nongovernmental and private organizations, to ensure equal access and quality of care;*
- *"Require all health services to be consistent with the human rights of women, including the rights to autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and choice;*
- *"Ensure that the training curricula of health workers includes comprehensive, mandatory, gender-sensitive courses on women's health and human rights, in particular gender-based violence."*

Only a small number of countries report to the committee each year. The impact of recommendations and rulings gains from their general relevance and cumulative application.

On 10 December 1999, Human Rights Day, the **Optional Protocol** to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was opened for signature, ratification and accession. As of 28-March 2000, 33 countries had signed the protocol and some had started parliamentary procedures required before ratification; 10 ratifications are needed for the protocol to enter into force. The Optional Protocol is a legal instrument that will enable victims of gender discrimination to submit complaints to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. By accepting the protocol, a state would recognize the committee's competence to receive and consider complaints from individuals or groups of individuals within its jurisdiction in cases where they have exhausted domestic remedies.

The Optional Protocol also enables the committee to initiate inquiries into situations of grave or systematic violations of women's rights. Although the protocol allows states upon ratification or accession to declare that they do not accept the inquiry procedure, it explicitly provides that no reservations may be entered to its terms. Upon its entry into force, the protocol will put the Convention on an equal footing with other human rights instruments that have individual complaints procedures, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The **Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** in April 2000 adopted a general recommendation which recognized that some forms of racial discrimination have unique and specific impacts on women. The committee resolved to take gender factors into account when examining racial discrimination.

In addition to the work of the treaty monitoring bodies, the **Commission on Human Rights** monitors states' compliance with international human rights law and investigates alleged rights violations. Operating through special rapporteurs and working groups, the Commission sends fact-finding missions to developing and developed countries in all parts of the world. There is, for example, a special rapporteur on violence against women.

In April 1999, the commission adopted consensus resolutions that called on governments to take effective action to combat trafficking in women and girls and violence against women. It also urged that all treaty bodies, special procedures and other United Nations human rights mechanisms systematically take a gender perspective into account in implementing their mandates.

### **International Conference Consensus Agreements**

While agreements reached at international conferences are not legally binding, the human rights treaty monitoring bodies can take their recommendations into account, for example, in setting standards and in making interpretations and recommendations. As expressions of international consensus, the conference agreements are also strong advocacy tools that can and do influence the formulation of national laws and policies. Several of the major conferences of the 1990s addressed issues of gender equality and women's rights.

The **World Conference on Human Rights**, held in Vienna in 1993, declared human rights to be a universal norm, independent of the standards of individual states. The Vienna Declaration emphasizes that the rights of women and girls are "an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights", requiring special attention as part of all human rights activities.

The conference urged that increased priority be given to eradicating all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex; to ensuring women's full and equal participation in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life; and to ending all forms of gender-based violence. Countries agreed that women's enjoyment of rights — including equal access to resources — is both an end in itself and essential to their empowerment, to social justice, and to overall social and economic development.

The Vienna Declaration also affirms that women should enjoy the highest standards of physical and mental health throughout their lifespans. It reaffirms the principle of equality between men and women, and the right to equal access to all levels of education. And it acknowledges women's right to accessible and adequate health care and the widest range of family planning methods and services.

As a result of the Vienna recommendations, the General Assembly in December 1993 adopted by consensus the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women — which stipulates that all states parties, in accordance with national legislation, should prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women, whether perpetrated by the state or private persons — and appointed a special rapporteur to monitor implementation of measures designed to end violence against women.

### **International Conference on Population and Development**

The 1994 ICPD recognized that empowering women and improving their status are important ends in themselves and essential for achieving sustainable development. The ICPD Programme of Action<sup>2</sup> affirmed that universally recognized human rights standards apply to all aspects of population programmes.

The Programme of Action sets out the context and content of reproductive rights. Paragraph 7.3 spells out the underlying precepts:

*[reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence as expressed in human rights documents.]*

Another landmark event in efforts to achieve full equality for women was the **Fourth World Conference on Women**, held in Beijing in 1995. The Platform for Action<sup>3</sup> adopted by the FWCW affirms that women's human rights are inalienable, universal, indivisible and interdependent. It puts forth the principle that rights for all must be defended in order that rights for any are preserved. It calls on all governments, organizations and individuals to promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all relevant human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and to work to ensure that equality of the sexes and non-discrimination based on gender exist both in the law and in practice.

The Beijing platform identifies "12 critical areas" of action needed to empower women

## **BOX 29**

### **The ICPD Programme of Action and Gender Equality**

*Principle 4 of the ICPD Programme of Action states: "Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes. The human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, are priority objectives of the international community."*

^

and ensure their human rights: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl-child.<sup>4</sup>

The FWCW reaffirmed and strengthened the consensus that had emerged at the ICPD in Cairo the year before. Much of the ICPD language on reproductive rights was incorporated directly into the Platform for Action. Paragraph 92 states: "Good health is essential to leading a productive and fulfilling life, and the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment." Paragraph 96 states: "The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence."

Following the FWCW, the Commission on the Status of Women was mandated to regularly review the Platform for Action's critical areas of concern and play a catalytic role in follow-up to the conference. The Commission, established in 1946, meets annually to make



recommendations and reports promoting equal rights for women and men in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields. Among other things, it ensured that the Universal Declaration on Human Rights included provisions on gender equality.

## **Five-year Reviews**

The consensus documents of the ICPD and other conferences are intended to lead to action. Five-year reviews have assessed progress towards the agreed goals, identified obstacles and set new benchmarks

The "ICPD+5" follow-up, for example, took place in 1998 and 1999 in a series of events<sup>5</sup> culminating in a special session of the General Assembly. The special session adopted a document on key actions for the further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. While endorsing all of the provisions of the ICPD Programme of Action, it went beyond that document in certain areas, including the reproductive rights of adolescents and of women in emergency situations.

The special session called on governments to respect, protect and promote the human rights of women and girls — particularly freedom from coercion, discrimination and violence, including harmful practices and sexual exploitation — by developing, implementing and effectively enforcing gender-sensitive policies and legislation. It called for intensified action on: reproductive and sexual health; maternal mortality; the reproductive health needs of adolescents; reducing abortion and addressing the health consequences of unsafe abortion; prevention of HIV/AIDS; gender issues and education (Boxes 4 and 7).

Governments were encouraged to sign, ratify and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; to remove reservations incompatible with the convention's objective and purpose; and to consult with civil society in the human rights treaty-reporting process. United Nations bodies responsible for indicators relating to women's human rights were urged to incorporate sexual and reproductive health issues.

The "Beijing+5" review, entitled "Women: 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century", took place 5-10 June 2000. The General Assembly session assessed progress in implementing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, adopted in 1985, and the FWCW Platform for Action, and considered future actions and initiatives (Box 5).

For the rights written into treaties and consensus documents to become a reality, they need to be incorporated into national laws, policies and programmes. The monitoring mechanisms growing out of the international conferences have made it much easier than in the past to keep abreast of national progress in turning ideals into realities.

Understandings about what human rights entail, and how they should be protected and monitored, are developed in a variety of processes, internationally and within countries. Consideration of gender factors needs to become an integral and systematic part of all these processes. Despite important progress, this largely remains to be achieved

## **Notes**

1. UNFPA. 1997. *The State of World Population 1997: The Rights to Choose:*

- Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health*, chapter 1. New York: UNFPA.
2. United Nations. 1995. *Population and Development, vol.1: Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development: Cairo, 5-13 September 1994*. New York: Department for Economic and Social Transformation and Policy Analysis, United Nations.
  3. United Nations. 1996. *The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action: Fourth World Conference on Women: Beijing, China 4-15 September 1995*. New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations.
  4. See: UNFPA. 2000. *Working to Empower Women: UNFPA's Experience in Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action*. New York: UNFPA.
  5. Leading up to the 30 June-2 July 1999 ICPD+5 special sessions, UNFPA organized three round table meetings in 1998 –adolescent sexual and reproductive health; reproductive rights and implementation of reproductive health programmes, women's empowerment, male involvement and human rights; and partnership with civil society in implementing the Programme of Action –and an international forum in the Hague in February 1999. There were also technical meetings on international migration and development; population and ageing; and reproduction health services in crisis situations; and regional reviews on population and development by the five United Nations regional commissions.

## **Reading 7**

Gerald West, and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, “The Bible story that became a campaign:

the Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and beyond)” *Ministerial Formation* – July 2004.

**THE BIBLE STORY THAT BECAME A CAMPAIGN:  
THE TAMAR CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH AFRICA (AND BEYOND)**

**Gerald West & Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela**

**Introduction**

The first time Tamar's story (2 Samuel 13:1-22) was used in a contextual Bible study was in 1996. Every two years the Institute for the Study of the Bible and Worker Ministry Project (ISB&WM) hosts a major workshop which brings together ordinary African Christians from churches, Christian organizations, Bible study groups, and all the projects the ISB&WM is associated with. The purpose of the workshop is to offer an opportunity to reflect theologically on a major issue confronting us in the South African context. After extensive consultation with churches, community organisations, and Bible study groups the theme for the 1996 workshop was chosen. The theme was "Women and the Bible in Southern Africa". The workshop was held at the Koinonia Conference Centre in Botha's Hill (near Pietermaritzburg) from the 23-27 September 1996. More than ninety women from all over the country attended; there were also guests from Kenya, Brazil, Malawi, Swaziland, and Lesotho.

The emphasis in the workshop, as in all the work of the ISB&WM, is on the voices of ordinary poor, working-class, and marginalised African Christians. Each participant is therefore encouraged to use their own language to express themselves; the workshop therefore took place using three languages: Zulu, Sotho, and English. In the workshop the ISB&WM also attempts to create a "safe space" where grassroots communities can speak for themselves (see West 2003 reprint).

The workshop was divided into three sub-themes: Women and Culture, Women and Violence, and Women and the Church. The theme for the third day was Women and Violence. The day started with devotions led by the Lesotho Women's Group. They read from 2 Samuel 13:12-18 and related the story to their own context. They emphasised that the laws of both the country and the church grant men all the privileges to prosecute, divorce, and excommunicate.

The devotion was followed by a Bible study based on the same passage, 2 Samuel 13:1-22, the rape of Tamar. The Bible study was facilitated by Gerald West and Gloria Plaatjie. The following questions were used to begin the Bible study.

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the male characters and what is the role of each of them in the rape of Tamar?
3. What is Tamar's response throughout the story?
4. Where is God in this story?

There was plenty of discussion in plenary. In response to Question 1 the participants said that the text was about: domestic violence, the cunningness of men, guilt, power, the silencing of women, and the loss of dignity. When discussing Question 2 the plenary analysed the role that each male had played in the rape of Tamar. It was recognized that the actions of Jonadab, David, and the servant had made the rape possible. Amnon was the rapist, but the others were accomplices. Absalom's role was more ambiguous, he had given his sister a home, but he had also told her to be silent about the rape. When the plenary discussed Question 3 they noted that Tamar was an articulate, strong woman. She had argued and pleaded with her brother Amnon, she had refused to be silent. The plenary felt that even though God was not directly mentioned in the text, that God had been with Tamar and that God would judge David, Amnon, and Jonadab. In the story, some said. God showed the weakness of men.

Following the plenary discussion, participants went back into small groups to discuss a range of other questions. The questions were:

5. In your own words retell the story of Tamar.
6. What effect or impact does the story of Tamar have on you as a Southern African woman?
7. How do society and the church react to a raped victim?
8. The media, NGOs, women's groups, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are advocating that women should break the culture of silence about violence against them. Do you find the legal system, the police, courts, hospitals, etc helpful when reporting a rape?
9. What message does the story of Tamar have for us?
10. In what way does the story of Tamar empower us?

Groups were able to choose the questions that they discussed. Women felt that the story of Tamar was empowering because it was a story in the Bible and therefore could be used in the church and community to break the silence surrounding rape and abuse. We must accept abuse as a reality, they said, and learn to listen to those who claim to have been abused, particularly our children. Women also felt that much more could be done by the legal system, police, hospitals, etc to support and protect women.

Because the ISB&WM realised that the Bible study would be a traumatic experience for many of the participants, they arranged for counsellors to be available. So after the Bible study Bev Haddad and Nhlanhla Mkhize from the Psychology Department at the University of Natal were available for counselling. Many women made use of this opportunity.

Later in the day there was a panel discussion which addressed the question of "Women's Rights and the New Constitution". Phumelele Ntombela-Nzimande from Natal Midlands Women's Coalition gave the historical background and subsequent developments of women's struggles in South Africa from as early as the 1950's to the present. She defined equality, challenged women to bring to life the Women's Charter, and encouraged women to support those women who were in prominent positions. Futhi Zikalala from the Centre of Criminal Justice at the University of Natal asserted that women must begin to question culture and religion. She challenged the inclusion of 'culture' in the South African constitution. Culture, she said, is the crystallisation of the opinions of those who oppress, those who advise, and those who just watch quietly. She urged that women organise themselves into support groups.

Motlalepule Chabaku, Speaker of the Free State Parliament, argued that nobody is an expert on life. She reminded participants that God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Women, she said, should not strive to be like men, but should aim for higher standards. Women should be willing, she argued, to acknowledge their ignorance and limitations, and then seek after knowledge. She contended for the non-sexism of African Languages, the need to liberate the

(English) Bible from sexist language and interpretations, and the need for women to have faith, courage and relentlessness.

The evening's devotions were conducted by the House of Studies for Worker Ministry. They read from Esther 4:13-16 and highlighted how women were exploited as objects of the king's sexual passions. They urged other women not to think of their own safety and comfort first, but to be willing to die for their neighbours.

This brief summary of day three of the Workshop shows how directly the story of Tamar relates to our South African context. The reverberations of Tamar's story have not stopped; she refuses to be silent.

### **A typical contextual Bible study on 2 Samuel 13:1-22**

In workshops on the theme of violence against women, we in the ISB&WM usually work with 2 Samuel 13:1-22, a neglected and marginalised text which is found in few lectionaries and seldom publicly read (and never on a Sunday). Having made sure that counselors are available we work with the following framework.

2 Samuel 13:1-22 is read aloud to the group as a whole. After the text has been read a series of questions follow.

*1. Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22 together again in small groups. Share with each other what you think the text is about.*

Each small group is then asked to report back to the larger group. Each and every response to question one is summarized on newsprint. After the report back, the participants return to their small groups to discuss the following questions.

*2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?*

*3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?*

*4. How does Tamar respond throughout the story?*

When the small groups have finished their discussion, and this takes considerable time, each group is invited to present a summary of their discussion. This is done in variety of ways; if there is time, each group is asked to report on each question, but if time is a constraint then each group is asked to report on only one question. The full report, which the scribe of the group puts up on newsprint, is then displayed for everyone to read at some other time. The report backs can also be presented more creatively, by way of drama, poetry or song.

After this report back the smaller groups reconvene and discuss the following questions.

*5. Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story.*

*6. What is the theology of women who have been raped?*

*7. What resources are there in your area for survivors of rape?*

Once again, the small groups present their report back to the plenary group.

Creativity is particularly vital here, as often women find it difficult or are unable to articulate their responses. A drama or a drawing may be the only way in which some groups can report.

Finally, each small group comes together to formulate an action plan.

*8. What will you now do in response to this Bible study?*

The action plan is either reported to the plenary or presented on newsprint for

other participants to study after the Bible study.

In our experience the effects of this Bible study are substantial. Women are amazed that such a text exists, are angry that they have never heard it read or preached, are relieved to discover that they are not alone, are empowered because the silence has been broken and their stories have been told. As one woman said, "If such a text exists in the Bible, how can we be silent about these things in the church?" How indeed!

The initial, opening question generates a host of responses as 'readers' share their early impressions of this seldom read text. Ordinary 'readers', whether literate or not, readily engage with questions 2, 3 and 4, returning to the text again and again to find out as much as they can about each of the characters, missing nothing. They note the way in which Jonadab, a relative of Amnon's, attempts to draw himself nearer to the potential heir to the throne of David by identifying his restrained lust. Reminding Amnon that he is indeed "son of the king" (13:4) and thereby implying that he should have whatever he wants, Jonadab provides a plan for the rape of Tamar. The slow pace of the story, with the graphic description of the plan and then its execution, are also picked up by ordinary 'readers' as they delve into 13:5-11. David, it seems to them, is somewhat irresponsible, unable to detect that Amnon's request is a ruse (13:6), and so he sends Tamar to be raped (13:7). (Some readers remember the earlier stories in 2 Samuel and comment on how often damage is done when David "sends".) Whatever restraint Amnon may have had now collapses as he premeditates the rape of his sister (13:9-14). Women 'readers', in particular, applaud the clear and careful way in which Tamar approaches her task and her defense. She trusts her brother and willingly serves him while he is sick; and even when she finds herself trapped, she argues articulately with him. First, she says a clear "No" (13:12), which should be enough. Second, she reminds him that he is her "brother" (13:12). Third, she makes it clear that she is not a willing participant and so names what he is doing, "forcing" her (13:12). Fourth, she reminds him of their cultural heritage and communal values, "for such a thing is not done in Israel" (13:12). Fifth, she declares his intentions to be vile and evil (13:12). Sixth, she appeals to what she hopes is some recognition of her situation, reminding him of the consequences of his actions for her (13:13). Seventh, she then turns the question on him, asking what the consequences of such an act on him will be (13:13). Eighth, she offers him a way out, at considerable cost to herself, suggesting that he speak to the king about marrying her (13:13). Alas, even this most articulate of all biblical women is not listened to, "and being stronger than she, he forced her and raped her" (13:14).

And even after the rape she does not remain silent, arguing with Amnon again, this time urging him not to abandon her to the consequences of rape on her own (13:16). But the male ego again refuses to hear, and she is forcefully (again) removed (13:16-17).

Tamar's public acknowledgment of the rape (13:19) is met with mixed reactions by women 'readers' as they both applaud her decision 'to go public' and worry at the cost of such a public statement in a patriarchal society. They find some comfort in Absalom's offer of sanctuary, but reject his silencing other (13:20). Finally, they are appalled by David's empty anger, and his impulse to protect his son (13:21).

Clearly, each of the male characters, whether it be David, Amnon, Jonadab, the servants, or Absalom, plays a role in the rape of Tamar, though their roles are different. This is how many men it takes to rape a woman!

The point of view of the narrator is interesting, with most 'readers' commenting that this 'male character' (presuming the narrator to be a male) is surprisingly sympathetic to the concerns of women. They are grateful that he names rape for what it is: a violent assault on a woman (13:14).

They are amazed by how articulate Tamar is and find many other arguments convincing. They especially like the fact that she finds aspects of her cultural and religious heritage potentially liberating, even if they are often used to oppress and dominate. Most of all they are astounded that such a text exists in the Bible, for they find it a remarkable resource with which to raise and discuss rape in their own contexts.

Questions 5, 6, and 7 provide plenty of opportunity for precisely such discussions, with many women finding "sacred space" to share the unshareable. They quickly discover that they are not alone, and soon the 'David's', 'Amnons', 'Jonadabs', 'servants', and 'Absaloms' in their own experiences are named. Clearly professional counseling is required in many such situations, and it is irresponsible to proceed without it.

Question 8 provides an opportunity 'to do something about it', and groups come up with wonderfully creative actions plans, whether to compose a liturgy for their local church or to challenge the local police station to provide resources for the survivors of rape.

Implicit in the Bible study as outlined above are all the elements of the contextual Bible study process (West 1993, 2000). The Bible study begins and ends with what can be called "community consciousness" questions. Questions 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 draw on the readings and resources of the local community group. By using small groups and writing up all responses the contributions of all participants are affirmed. Habitually, responses to question 1 elicit the public transcript; participants offer interpretations they have received and which they feel are safe to proclaim publicly. They know what they are expected to believe about the Bible. However, there are usually some responses which are more ambiguous and which potentially provide space for more authentic interpretations - interpretations that articulate something of their experiential/ 'working' theologies. If the group becomes a safe place, if there are resources to articulate what is often incipient and inchoate, and if there are resonance with others in the group, then gradually elements of 'working', 'lived' faith may be more overtly and vigorously voiced and owned.

Clustered in between the community consciousness questions are a series of what might be called "critical consciousness" questions. These questions are the contribution of the socially engaged biblical scholar, and provide resources for repeated returns to the text and more careful and close 'reading'. In this example, the critical consciousness questions draw on literary modes of interpretation, posing questions about characters, plot, setting, etc. Such structured and systematic questions are not usually in the repertoire of ordinary 'readers', though once asked, the questions are readily grasped and appropriated. The advantage of using questions which draw on literary modes of interpretation is that they do not require any input from the socially engaged biblical scholar ('the expert'). The questions are contribution enough, and ordinary 'readers' make of them what they will. However, in many instances ordinary 'readers' want access to resources that are only available to the 'trained' reader. So, for example, participants may want to know the significance of Tamar tearing her clothing. In such cases, the socially engaged biblical scholar may offer socio-historical resources in response to this question, choosing to do this, preferably and where possible, by drawing on parallels in the participants' own socio-historical context.

In our experience literary-type questions almost always lead into socio-historical-type questions; this is important, because it indicates the need ordinary 'readers' have to locate faith in real concrete contexts. But by beginning with literary-type questions and by allowing socio-historical-type questions to emerge from the participants, the powerful presence of the biblical scholar is held in check. Equally importantly, by waiting for the questions to arise from the participants, we can be sure that we are answering questions of interest to them rather than questions of interest to us biblical scholars (on which the industry of biblical scholarship is based).

Critical consciousness questions facilitate a more careful and close reading of the text than is usually the case among ordinary 'readers'. They give the text a voice, and in so doing open up potential lines of connection with faith trajectories in the biblical tradition that have been neglected or suppressed. Women discover, to return to our example, that they are not alone, that their terror can be found in the Bible, and while this "text of terror" (Trible 1984) perhaps offers little comfort, it does at least acknowledge the reality of their experience.

The concluding community consciousness questions (5, 6, 7, and 8) ground the Bible study firmly in the life of the participants. In responding to these questions, community consciousness and critical consciousness fuse and fashion faith interpretations (Pane 1995) that make sense and which are an expression of the 'lived', 'working' theologies of ordinary believers. Whether or how these incipient and inchoate faith interpretations are articulated depends on how safe the contextual Bible study process is. In safe places women who have been touched by Tamar tell their stories, help and hold the pain of their sisters, and plan for the transformation of their churches and communities. Unfortunately, not all Bible study groups are safe, and so some women may remain silent, waiting still. But the potential is there, implicit within the contextual Bible study process and this text for the articulation, owning, and acting out of those interpretations and theologies that ordinary 'readers' of the Bible live by.

### **The beginning of the Tamar Campaign**

Since that workshop in 1996 we have continued to use the text of 2 Samuel 13:1-22 in contextual Bible studies. Contextual Bible study is a form of Bible study in which ordinary people are given the opportunity to speak for themselves about how they hear God speaking to them through the Bible. Biblically trained scholars enter into a partnership with ordinary (often illiterate or semi-literate) Bible 'readers', each bringing their resources to a contextual interpretation of the Bible (see West 1993, 2000). Because our context continues to be shaped by violence against women and children, we have continued to use the story of Tamar in our contextual Bible studies.

Bible studies on this text are a common feature of the work of the Women and Gender Programme of the ISB&WM. At the end of the 1996 workshop the ISB&WM was challenged to appoint someone who would work alongside women, so we began immediately to raise funds. Towards the end of 1998 we were able to appoint Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela as the Coordinator of our Women and Gender Programme. Since her appointment Tamar's story has been used in many Bible studies to create space for women (and men) to break the silence about abuse in many varied contexts.

One of the sites in which we used this Bible study was the Uniting Reformed Church in Hammarsdale, a semi-rural community near Pietermaritzburg. The ISB&WM was invited to conduct a two-day workshop with young people and the lay leaders of this church in 1999. Staff from the ISB&WM, including Gerald West and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela (and some visitors from Dan Church Aid), facilitated a Bible study on the first day using the story of Tamar. Violence against women and children was one of the contextual concerns among church members. There was large number of young people present, particularly young women. We were also fortunate to have the minister of the congregation with us, and he joined us in the contextual Bible study.

We divided the local participants into small groups on the basis of age and gender. So we had a group for older men (including the minister), a group for older women, a group for young men, and two groups for young women. Our visitors from Dan Church Aid were placed in group on



their own. While the participants worked together in small groups on the Bible study questions (similar to those above and below), the ISB&WM staff observed and enabled the process of mutual sharing to take place.

When it came to the report back from groups, each group's representative gave a summary of what the group had discussed. This took place for each of the questions, including question 8: "What will you now do in response to this Bible study?" This question helps groups to formulate an action plan, assisting them to move beyond the Bible study into their actual context. Each group reported what they had planned, and there were many exciting and challenging ideas. However, when we tried to conclude the workshop, one of the groups interrupted us and insisted that there was still one small group to report. We checked, but it seemed to us that we had covered all the groups. No, we were told, all the groups had not reported, for the group of ISB&WM staff had not reported on their action plan. Initially we thought they were joking with us, but they were serious. We then pointed out that our action plan was to do contextual Bible studies when churches and communities invited us to work with them. No, we were told, this is not what they meant. They wanted to know what specifically we planned to do in response to this particular Bible study!

When we realised how serious this group of young women were, we met together and gave serious thought to their challenging question. The result is the Tamar Campaign! We committed ourselves there and then to initiating a regional (and perhaps national) campaign in which we would commemorate Tamar and her story.

The rest is history, as they say. We launched the Tamar Campaign the very next year, in 2000, with the aim of encouraging the churches to speak out against violence against women and children and with the related aim of supporting survivors of violence.

## **The Tamar Campaign**

Like any birth, we had great dreams, but the practicality of getting it all started was not as easy as we thought. The demands of the young people who had challenged us were still ringing in our ears. We first had to decide exactly what the aims of a campaign like this would be. We also knew very well that most churches saw the issue of gender violence as something that belonged in the private sphere as opposed to being openly discussed by either churches or communities. We felt the 16 days of activism on no violence against women, November 25 to December 10, was a perfect opportunity to launch this campaign. Three women, Futhi Ntshingila, who is now a journalist, Sarojini Nadar, the Coordinator of International Network for Advanced Theological Education, and the Coordinator of the ISB&WM's Women and Gender Programme, Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela worked together to produce the first resources of the campaign. We enlisted the help of a poster designer to portray the message of pain and suffering which we as the church and society have chosen to hide or ignore.

We decided that we wanted churches to openly speak out against abuse. We had learnt from previous workshops that the church responded with unhelpful suggestions to survivors of abuse. Women are usually encouraged to pray for their abusive partners or to persevere in the abusive relationship. More often than not it was the woman's faith that was questioned instead of the abuser being confronted.

We also realized that texts which dealt with the issue of abuse are not popular in churches. They are not read or used for sermons. We felt it was important for these texts to be read publicly. We

knew from experience that these texts encouraged women to share their own stories of pain, and only then can they be referred to places where they could get help.

A common understanding of abuse was that it was primarily physical. We felt it was important for women to be aware of the other dimensions of abuse, including sexual, economic, verbal, psychological and spiritual dimensions. Our cultures and religion clearly provide a setting for all these forms of abuse to take place without being reported or challenged. Most women have accepted this as their lot, believing this is how God has ordered the world! Some women believe the other kinds of abuse are not as bad as physical abuse!

We therefore believed it was important for ministers to use the pulpit to challenge the notion of accepting abuse as part of life. We felt it was fair to ask them to use the Sundays of the sixteen days of activism for sermons on gender violence, its causes and consequences. While we received a lot of support from those churches and leaders who had been exposed to a Bible Study on Tamar's story, those who had not encountered Tamar and her story were reluctant to take this campaign seriously.

With the assistance of colleagues with computer skills we managed to design the initial resources, which were posters and pamphlets. In 2001 we also published a newspaper that had different articles on violence against women. This was edited by Beverly Haddad, the Gender worker at the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA). We are proud to say this newspaper was distributed to many churches and organizations as an insert in *Challenge* magazine, a prophetic South African ecumenical magazine.

Initially we committed ourselves to making this an interfaith campaign. This proved to be difficult because the Bible was our main resource, though we did try to get other faith communities to identify texts in their sacred texts that might be useful. We invited as many human rights organizations as possible to join us, especially those that were committed to the emancipation of women. The response was not as widespread as we would have hoped, demonstrating just how difficult it is to tackle gender issues in our context. Eventually we were joined by a few faith based organizations who committed themselves to the dissemination of the material in churches and communities. These organizations also contributed financially as we then had limited funds for the Campaign within the ISB&WM. The staff of all the committed organizations used every available opportunity to promote the Campaign.

*Learn with Echo*, which is a project of the University of KwaZulu-Natal that specializes in the production of material for adult learners, wrote an excellent article on the Campaign, incorporating material from our documentation. This article formed part of an insert in one of the most widely read local newspapers, the *Natal Witness*. We also managed to secure a slot with the isiZulu Radio Station (*UKhozi*) which reaches millions of people in our country. From these sources we received many telephone calls from people who needed help and we were invited to places which we had never thought would be open to the Campaign, like clinics and nursing colleges.

### **Shaped by the needs of communities**

The issue of HIV and AIDS kept coming up each time we facilitated workshops on gender violence. One woman asked, "What would have happened if Amnon had also infected Tamar with HIV?" This was then a burning issue at the time as our government was struggling with the rights of women who are raped and infected by their rapists. Another burning issue was raised by

women who claimed that no matter how informed and empowered they are, if their partners do not understand the realities of gender violence and HIV and AIDS then their lives are not any better. At the beginning of 2002 we therefore introduced men and gender work and we also added the link between gender violence and HIV and AIDS.

At this point, we realized that we had to redesign the poster and pamphlets to incorporate the way in which the Campaign was being shaped by our local contexts. With the help of a feminist artist, Dina Cormick, we managed to produce a poster that incorporates all the different issues that we seek to address with this Campaign. The new posters are brighter and more explicit. Young people particularly have found them more challenging and easier to understand. Indeed, the poster on its own can be used as a tool for discussion. We were able to make all these innovations thanks to substantial funding from the Australian Agency for International Development's Addressing Gender Violence Fund over a period of three years.

We use a range of different methodologies to achieve the Campaign's aims. Though our basic approach is contextual Bible study, sometimes there just is not enough time or an appropriate opportunity to facilitate a workshop or Bible Study, and so we have learnt to be flexible and use whatever amount of time there is and whatever resources are available. For example, at the beginning of 2004, in collaboration with PACSA, we invited a group of performers to perform their powerful stage play on rape, *Tsapeng: the third testament*. This is a remarkable play, based on an actual case of child rape. It has a profoundly powerful message of pain and hope with amazing Christologies and images of God. This was attended by activists, church leaders, young men and women. The discussion which was held afterwards was engaged and moving. Community members and church leaders committed themselves to being proactive and to raise the alarm if children and women are raped.

We also use invitations concerning other contextual issues to raise the issues of the Campaign. Within our work in the ISB&WM we do considerable work in the area of economic justice, providing resources, including Bible studies, which contribute to building a basic economic literacy. We often use these opportunities to introduce the Campaign. Because the Campaign addresses issues which are a growing problem in our communities, it usually is received very well. People are always shocked and disappointed to find that there are texts that are hardly ever read in our churches. When we ask groups to write down their plans of action after workshops, one of their goals is to challenge their leaders to read the texts which we use for the Campaign.

The posters and pamphlets have been distributed at every opportunity. This has resulted in a greater awareness in all the sectors of our society and beyond. While attending a conference in Zimbabwe for church leaders who are infected/personally affected by HIV and AIDS, our Women and Gender Coordinator, Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, was given an opportunity to speak, and the Tamar Campaign was one of the things she talked about. This resulted in her being invited to run the Campaign in Zambia, and so the following year she went there at the invitation of Aglow Zambia, a women's organisation, to launch the Tamar Campaign in Zambia. Wonderfully, the Campaign was not only recognized as a powerful tool by church leaders in Zambia but also received support from government departments.

## **Conclusion**

This campaign has changed many people's lives; Tamar's protest has given many women a voice. Young men have been infuriated by the actions of the many men in the story who are accomplices in the rape of Tamar. This has encouraged them to promote a different culture of

respect and protecting their loved ones. Church leaders have used this text as a tool to encourage a spirit of openness within churches. These issues were for a long time seen as taboo and had no place within the church. Just like during the apartheid years, it took a long time for the church to exercise its prophetic authority. The increase in the number of children and women who are raped has forced the church to recover its prophetic voice and Tamar's story has provided important resources and has build capacity for doing this. *Aluta continua*, the struggle does indeed continue, but we can win the battle against gender violence and the spread of HIV and AIDS, if we work together.

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## READING 8

Irmgard Fischer, 'Go and Suffer Oppression!' said God's Messenger to Hagar: Repression of Women in Biblical Texts. In Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Shawn Copeland, eds. *Violence against Women*. London: SCM Press, 1994. pp.75-82.

Phyllis Trible includes the story of the slave-girl Hagar (Gen. 16; 21) in her *Texts of Terror*. There is no denying it: in the biblical writings there are texts which legitimate social discrimination against women and sometimes even violence against women. From an early stage this problem has been a theme of feminist scholarship.

### I. Biblical texts with sexual violence against women as their theme

To the stories discussed by Phyllis Trible in her *Texts of Terror*, of the rape of the unnamed wife of the Levite (Judg. 19f.; with reference to the parallel Gen. 19, Lot's daughters) and Tamar (II Sam. 13), should be added the stories of Dinah (Gen. 34) and the abandonment of Sarah (Gen.12.10ff.), the compulsion on Bathsheba to sleep with David (II Sam. II), and the charge of adultery laid against Susanna (Dan. 13). The legal regulations about the rape of virgins (Ex. 22.15f.; Deut.22.23ft.) should similarly be included among the 'texts of terror' because they treat the offence as a violation of the rights of the father or future husband and not as a crime against the woman. Acceptance of the possibility for the free Israelite full citizen to have intercourse with slave girls and (virgin) women taken as prisoners of war (Num. 31.18) must also be seen as the institutionalization of sexual violence against women by society.

All these narratives are concerned with violence against women, which runs the whole gamut of repression of women because they are women, from sexual denunciation (Dan. 13) through compulsion (Gen.12.10ff.; II Sam. II) to rape (Gen. 34; II Sam. 13) and sexual murder (Judg. 19).

The narratives adopt very different attitudes in evaluating cases: some of the violent actions are explicitly condemned on the basis of sensitivity to social laws (e.g. II Sam. 13); in other narratives God intervenes directly to rescue a woman from her oppression (e.g. Gen. 12.10ff.), in yet others God avenges the injustice later (e.g. II Sam. II), but not always in such a way as to help the woman (Judg. 19).

In her hermeneutical approach, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza points out that texts which do not explicitly condemn such violence cannot 'claim the authority of divine revelation', but are to be read as a memory of suffering in order to open up the perspective of hope for liberation as a dangerous, subversive recollection.<sup>2</sup>

Ancient Israelite society had a patriarchal constitution: in other words, a few males had power over all other socially inferior males, and over women and children.<sup>3</sup> Although we can learn from the texts of the First Testament about individual women who were very strong and also made their mark politically, women did not have the same rights and possibilities as free Israelite men. This social imbalance of the sexes must be taken into account in all the texts.

### 2. Androcentric law legitimates violence against women

Now there are also biblical texts which attempt to legitimate the harassment of women by divine authority. The so-called 'Jealousy Ordeal' in Numbers 5.II-31<sup>4</sup> may be taken as an example. The

ordeal is introduced with the words, 'Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites and say to them . . .' Here the following instruction is clearly presented and authorized as proclamation of the will of the God of Israel.

In the genre of casuistic law, first the case is presented of an adulteress who was not caught in the act but whose husband is suspicious or simply jealous (5.12b-14a). At the same time, however, the possibility that the husband is unjustly accusing his wife is considered (v.14b). To discover whether the woman is guilty or innocent, the husband is given the right to haul her before the priest. She must drink the water of bitterness, holy water with dust and the materialized curse (v. 23). The woman also has to say 'Amen, Amen', and thus bring down a conditional curse upon herself. True, the conjuration of the priest (vv. 19f.) first mentions the possibility of innocence, and indicates that this will be demonstrated by the water of bitterness; however, far more words are devoted to the possibility of guilt: the woman becomes the proverbial curse. The possibility of innocence is considered second, in accordance with the casuistic law which is presented at the beginning: if the woman remains unscathed. Up to this point the casuistic law is strictly maintained: in each case there is a clear distinction between guilty and innocent, and in the words of the priest the assumption of innocence comes first. However, the final summary of this Torah on jealousy shows the problem: according to Old Testament law one would expect the punishment of a man who had unjustly accused his wife. But this principle, which serves as a deterrent against false accusations in sacral justice to guard against calumny (Deut. 19.16ff.; Dan. 13.61ff.), evidently does not apply to women who are denounced over sexual matters. Any husband who unjustly accuses his wife out of jealousy is free of guilt (5.31a)! But the wife is not free to subject herself to the procedure, while for the husband the call for the divine judgment is completely without risk.

Here it is evident that divine law and the divine verdict are one-sidedly commandeered by and for males. As in the narrative texts the theme of which is violence against women, the inequality of the sexes is evident here. Such texts must be clearly recognized as androcentric by preaching and exegesis which seeks to speak to our day.

### **3. The legitimization of the oppression of women in the process of theologizing by means of biblical texts**

It is essentially more difficult to deal with biblical texts which in their original form were composed as texts about the liberation of women, but have been reinterpreted repressively. As an example of how stories of liberation can become stories about oppression, I shall comment here on the two stories of the expulsion of Hagar and her child, Gen. 16 and 21.8-21.

As I mentioned at the beginning, Phyllis Tribble treats these two texts as 'texts of terror', since God legitimates the oppressive action of the patriarchal couple Abraham and Sarah. Tribble considers the two narratives exclusively in their final form; if we do not investigate the literary growth of the text and only begin from the final form, we can agree with this finding.

However, the two narratives are not all of a piece, and in both cases one must voice a suspicion that the passages which legitimate the violence against Hagar were only inserted at a later stage.

The first parts of the two narratives which recount the separation of Hagar from the patriarchal couple are stories about the oppression of Hagar, who has no social rights, in the house of her master and mistress. However, in each case the second part takes place in the wilderness and recounts the encounter of Hagar with a messenger of God who imparts a message of salvation for her future. In the final text what we have here is an explanation, which is narrated twice, of why Hagar and her son Ishmael live apart from the patriarchal couple and Isaac is thus the only legitimate heir and vehicle of the promise.

## Hagar's flight: Genesis 16

We must think in terms of a three-stage process of growth in the case of Genesis 16.<sup>5</sup>

The basic narrative (Gen 16B) tells the story of a woman who has no freedom, who is used by her mistress as a solution to the latter's infertility, and when she refuses to give her consent, is sexually exploited. She is to bear for Sarah the child Sarah longs for. Sarah is thinking only of herself. What matters is *her* wish for a child, not an heir for Abraham (v. 2). However, the slave girl used as a means to an end is aware of her value within the family when she becomes pregnant. She is no longer prepared to accept the social structure of mistress and slave. Neither Sarah nor Abraham, who have initiated the triangular relationship, is capable of providing a constructive solution to the difficulties posed by this situation. Sarah does not have things out with Hagar, but avoids putting herself on the same level as Hagar. She discusses the matter with someone of her own kind, with Abraham. She accuses him on the grounds that his refusal to recognize the slave girl is violence against her (v. 5) and that he is causing this by his own passive role as an onlooker. Abraham reacts in a dismissive way. He evades the conflict by refusing any protection to Hagar, the woman who is bearing his child, and reminding Sarah of her high social position: 'Behold, your slave is in your hand, do to her as you please!' (v. 6). Sarah makes excessive use of the force granted the mistress by the patriarchal system, which legitimates not only the rule of the male over the female but also a social hierarchy. She so overdoes her authority over someone who is not free that this slave, aware of her position, flees from her harsh mistress. Thus the one who is oppressed herself puts an end to the history of oppression. The pressure of suffering is evidently so great that Hagar takes upon herself the risks of the runaway slave, who was punished extremely severely in the ancient Near East (the only way in which the system of slavery could survive). Hagar flees into the wilderness and rests by a spring.

The second part of the story begins with this change of place and situation (vv. 7-14); in Gen. 16B it is a tale of liberation. YHWH's messenger meets Hagar by the spring, addresses her by name (for the first time in Gen. 16!), and asks her where she has come from and where she is going. Hagar replies truthfully to the question where she has come from: she is the slave of Sarah, from whom she has escaped. She herself cannot answer the question where she is going, but God's messenger can: beginning with her pregnant state, he promises her that she shall bear a son and that he will be free, indeed will even be able to prevail against his brothers. In Gen 16B the God of the patriarchal couple thus acts against their will and against the hierarchical-social subjection of the slave to the mistress. He endorses the revolutionary act of flight from slavery! So the original narrative Gen 16B is a story of liberation. YHWH sets himself against his elect when these are oppressive; he puts himself on the side of those to whom violence is done.

A revision (= Gen 16R, probably from the hand that put Gen. 21 in its present context) now adds vv. 9, 10, a command to return and a promise, despite the fact that these make the divine messenger's words to the slave girl (16.11f.) anachronistic. However, the divine messenger does not follow general legal practice in the ancient Near East by sending the slave girl back to her mistress, but calls for her subjection to both mistress and master (16.9 plural; cf. 16.6, singular!). In this way not only is the order of maid and masters restored, making YHWH a God who sustains the system, but the oppression is explicitly legitimated and submission is called for. While the promise in v. 10 which is added later tones down somewhat the command to return, the divine pedagogy is one of the carrot and the whip. The story of liberation is made a story of oppression.

However, Genesis 16 is worked over yet once more. Verses 3, 15, 16 can be excised as the latest, Priestly part. P has Ishmael born in the house of the patriarchal couple (vv. 15f.).<sup>6</sup> Abraham recognizes him as a legitimate son (17.18ff.). So it is understandable that in P Sarah brings her slave girl Hagar to Abraham as a legitimate wife (*issa*, not concubine). Moreover in P Ishmael is never separated from his father — P has no account of any separation. The story of Hagar is not told as a text of terror but rather as the story of an upwardly mobile woman: she is

buried as the slave-girl wife of her master, to whom she bears the longed-for son who will maintain the tribe's existence.

### *The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, Genesis 21*

The second story, about the separation of Hagar and her son from the patriarchal couple, is not a literary unit either. Verses 11-13 have been inserted into the original basic narrative (Gen 21B). The story loses nothing by their omission. Sarah's wish is sufficient reason for the command to Abraham to drive them out, and is only subsequently endowed with divine authority: the promise to Abraham for his son Ishmael in v. 13 is given to Hagar in almost the same words in v. 18, and is more in place there as a prospect of the future life of Ishmael, who has been rescued from death. The note about the continuation of the genealogy through Isaac serves to give a reason for the harsh command; the introductory comment that Abraham is displeased with his son attempts to put the patriarch in a better light.

The basic narrative has a similar structure to that of **Gen 16B**. Here too Sarah is the driving force. The cause of the conflict is not a dispute between women but rivalry between sons over their inheritance. Sarah's assertion that Ishmael will not share the inheritance with Isaac, her son, is a deliberate distortion of the legal situation: the son of a slave girl is only entitled to inherit if he is acknowledged as a son. If Ishmael is not recognized by his father, then the question of inheritance just does not arise. But if he is, he is Abraham's firstborn, and as second son Isaac inherits only with him, in a lower, second place.

Sarah's words are again egocentric (cf. 16.2). She does not speak of their son, but only of *her* son. And again Abraham unquestioningly obeys Sarah's instructions by doing what she wants. He sends his firstborn and the child's mother into the wilderness with barely a day's rations. In Gen. 21 Hagar does not leave her master's house by her own decision, but is driven out against her will. Whereas the resolute woman in Gen. 16 finds a spring by which she rests, in Gen. 21, as outcast she wanders around aimlessly in the wilderness. When the scant provision of water comes to an end, her son is in acute danger of death. She sits some way from him and weeps in despair. The picture of death painted by the narrator could hardly be darker. Hagar receives a saving oracle and God shows her the life-giving spring from which she can give her son something to drink. Sarah sees the fulfilment of the promise given to the outcast for her son: God is with the boy until his adulthood.

So in its original form this version, too, is a story of the oppression, expulsion and dire need of a woman, though this is transformed into a story of salvation by the divine encounter. However, the revision makes it, too, a text of terror for women. The God who promises the father on the point of driving out his son that he also has a promise for him lets the boy get to the point of death.<sup>7</sup> Just as Abraham is merely concerned about his son, and not about the mother of his child (v. n), so in vv. 121. God does not mention the woman at **all (v. 12f.)**. He approves the expulsion which first brings Hagar the deepest despair! In protecting the heirs of his promise from a rival, God endangers the life of the defenceless, the socially weak!

The revision of the texts turns the liberator God who in the basic narratives in Gen. 16 and 21 supports those who are deprived of their rights, oppressed and outcast, and who breaks open the structure of a slave-owning society, into one who preserves the system. He is now in fact the 'God of the fathers', who without reservation supports his elect. He legitimates YHWH sanctions the superiority and subordination unquestioningly practised by the patriarchal system. Nor does he do this just by leaving it intact as a social fact, but rather by deliberately affirming it. The reviser could have achieved his aim of making Ishmael come into the world in the house of the patriarchal couple by a simple command to return. The express instruction to submit to even harsher oppression is an addition made from a theological perspective which so over-emphasizes the connection with God's elect that the ethical imperative 'Remember that you were a slave' is totally obscured.



In Genesis 21 it is probable that in connection with the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen. 22 we have a working out of the experience derived from the exile that God does not preserve people from catastrophe but rescues them in it. However, there is an essential difference between the two narratives, parallel in structure, of the 'sacrifice' of the two sons of Abraham, both of whom are rescued in extreme distress only by heavenly intervention: in Gen. 21 the parent who goes along with the child threatened by death does not go willingly. Hagar does not decide, like Abraham, of her own accord to obey a divine command. The expulsion is forced on her. If Gen. 21 is read without its context, Genesis 22, the story is a text which legitimates the expulsion of women and children without giving them provisions, in 'sacred' trust that God will take care of them.

Although it is not the prime concern of the revisions to approve of terror against women, the history of the tradition or the rewriting of these two biblical narratives nevertheless documents the ongoing temptation of an androcentric theology to set down its interests and social structures in the name of God. The process of theologizing, which is always necessary for an adequate proclamation, has to take up contemporary questions, but then always loses its innocence if for the sake of answering these questions it prescribes and legitimates injustice for socially weak groups. From biblical times to the present day it is predominantly women and children who become victims of such a (pseudo-)theological 'terror'.

One central statement about the nature of the God of Israel is the characterization of him as an advocate of widows and orphans and those who have no helper (Ps. 146.9; cf. Deut. 10.18). The confession by Israel of a God who welcomes the socially weak and those without rights is at the same time bound up with the confession that this God avenges transgressions against the rights of the poor and the oppressed. YHWH is a God of liberation from the house of slavery. So in Israel there must be no oppression (cf. Deut. 15.15). Thus all the texts of the Bible have to be measured by this central theologoumenon of Israel. That also includes those which in developing ever so urgent theological concerns think that they can reinterpret YHWH's option for the poor or make it secondary.

## Notes

1. Cf. also P. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia 1978 reissued London 1992.

2. E. Schiessler Fiorenza, *Brot statt Steine*, Fribourg 1988, 55f.

3. For this definition of the patriarchy see E. Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, New York and London 1983, 78.

4. In literary terms the text is not perhaps a genuine unit; cf. P. J. Budd, *Numbers*, Waco, TX 1984, 62-7.

5. For the following demarcation and exegesis see my Habilitationsschrift, *Untersuchungen zur theologischen Relevanz der Frauexte in den Erzelttem-Emdhlungen*, Graz 1993 (forthcoming 1994).

6. The insertion of P in Gen. 16 thus presupposes the command to return (= Gen 16R).

7. Scholars take virtually no heed of the consequences of the insertion of the divine discourse for the image of God which results!

## READING 9

Sr Mary John Manazan, "Theological Reflections on violence against Women"  
In *Challenges to the Inner Room*. Manila: The Institute of Women's Studies, 1998. pp. 68-76.

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is one of the most blatant manifestations of patriarchy that cut across class, race, creed, and nationality. Many sociological, anthropological, and psychological treatises have been written about it. But Church authorities, except for a few, have been silent about this, even after they have written pastoral letters on ecology, the unjust economic order, racism, and other issues. This paper will try to see how this phenomenon has been present in the life of the Church, how the Church has handled it so far, and what possible alternative actions can be taken.

#### Violence in the Bible: Texts of Terror

One may take in stride four Bible stories of women during the many times one has gone over these. But in the book *Texts of Terror*, Phyllis Trible uses the literary critical method, from a feminist perspective, to retell these stories. Amazingly, the horror of these texts is revealed. These are the stories of Hagar, who suffered what could be considered psychological and emotional violence as the repudiated and abused maid of Sarah. There is the story of Tamar, sister of Absalom, who is lusted after, raped, and repudiated by her own half-brother Amnon. This causes a war of revenge that leads to the rape and enslavement of 600 hundred more women. There is the gruesome tale of the nameless concubine who was gang-raped and then brutally cut into pieces by her "master." Lastly, there is the sacrifice of the daughter of Jephthah, who had to die in her youth to fulfill the vow of her father.

These horrible stories could only happen in a highly patriarchal world:

*The Hebrew world considered the wife to be the exclusive property of her husband, no different, sometimes, from his material possessions... A woman was treated as a perpetual "minor under the guardianship of her father, her brother, her husband, or her husband's brother. (Dt. 25:5'6) There was no place for her except in domestic duties: she acquired social status solely through her sexual functions as wife and mother and not through her personal worth or basic dignity as a human being. Denied access to any kind of learning, even of the Torah, women were not allowed to speak in public, not even to their husbands. Their testimony was not admissible in a court of law and they had no say whatsoever in political decision-making. In the Temple, women could not enter the court of the Israelite and even less the sanctuary where sacrifices were offered.*

A Heritage of Violence: A Pastoral Reflection on Conjugal Violence by the Social Affairs Committee of the Assemble of Quebec Bishops, 1989, pp. 28-29.

No wonder women's fate in such society was horrible. Stripped of all autonomy, they were objects of lust, contempt, and violence, and, as shown by our stories, subject to abandonment, rape, mutilation, and death.

The New Testament gave a glimpse of change that could have happened in the teachings of Christ and in the respectful and humane way Jesus treated women. However, his disciples and later on the Churches that the apostles founded did not seem to learn this aspect of Christ's teaching or example.

### **Misogynistic Writings in Church History**

The writings and teachings of the fathers of the Church are of utmost importance in the creation of normative principles and attitudes in the new Church. Unfortunately, these supposedly holy and intelligent men had such low opinion of women that their misogynistic attitude became the foundation of the way women would be thought of and treated in the course of the centuries.

Some examples of their misogyny:

St. Paul: "Wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (Ep.5:24)

Tertullian: "You are the Devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine Law. You are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die." (Tertullian, *De Cuitu Fern.* 1,1)

Augustine: "We are men, you are women, we are the head, you are the members, we are masters, you are slaves." (Quoted in Julia Kelly "Women in 16th-Century Spain," in *Reveu Hispanique*, vol. LXX, p. 500.)

Jerome: "As long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man." (Commentary to the Epistle to the Ephesians, III, 5.)

The later doctors of the Church were no better. The active force in the male, Jerome writes, "tends to the production of perfect likeness in the masculine sex, while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or from some external influence." (*Summa T.*, Q.92, art. 1) Woman is therefore a misbegotten male. She is also less rational than the male, because the latter, as a fetus, receives the infusion of the soul immediately, whereas the female fetus has to wait for at least 50 days.

One can give countless examples. The point is that there is a long and continuous history of misogyny in Church history that accounts for the tenacity of the interiorization of both of men and women about the inferiority, subordination, and all the other stereotyped ideas about women contributing to their susceptibility to victimization.

## **The Inquisition and Violence Against Women**

It is not only the misogynistic writings in Church history that are so, reprehensible. There are documented acts of violence to women by the Church through the instrumentality of the inquisition. Women mystics, healers, or women who did not quite fit the categories allotted to them were persecuted, hunted, and even burned at the stake.

In 1484, the book *Malleus Malificarum* classified all the supposedly foul activities of these "witches." The most modest estimate was about two million women killed after being tortured between the 12th and 17th centuries, including Joan of Arc. Women who gave birth without screaming might be regarded as "not saved" by the pangs of childbirth that were supposed to be the retribution for the sin of Eve in "tempting" Adam. It could be interpreted that a woman's childbirth was aided by the devil and would thus make her a likely candidate for witchhunt.

Canon Law itself justified wife-beating:

*In the Middle Ages, the Church as well as the state gave husbands the legal right to inflict corporal punishment. There were laws which specified in which cases of bad conduct women could be severely beaten with a whip or a stick, and in which cases moderate chastisement was in order. Some within the Church went so far as to demand that this be done with dignity'.*

*A Heritage of Violence, p. 31.*

## **Religious Education And Violence Against Women**

One can establish a direct connection between traditional religious education of woman and her victimization. Women had always been taught to be submissive, docile, patient, long-suffering, self-sacrificing. These are all characteristics of a victim consciousness. Thus, religious education is a conditioning of women to become victims of violence.

In Philippine history, many books written for the formation of young girls were translated into the native languages and dialects. Such books contained admonitions to the virtues listed above with horror stories to illustrate the punishment of those who did not conform to the model the friars had set up. Ironically one of the virtues the friars taught the *mujer indigena* was chastity or virginity, which did not belong to the values of the pre-Spanish society. The irony lies in the fact that while teaching this virtue, many of them were at the same time robbing our women of the very same virtue. The documents on the Inquisition in the Philippines stored in the Archive General de Nacion illustrate the solicitaciones done by friars. These solicitaciones are not a thing of the past. They are happening today. I am sure many of us have concrete examples of these.

## Theological Imperatives

Many kinds of reflections have been done on violence against women: psychological, anthropological, sociological, etc. But there has not been enough theological reflection. It seems to me that all the branches of theology need to make a reflection on this condition of women. Dogmatic and Fundamental Theology should see how the doctrine of God-Father has reinforced the patriarchal notion of the absolute power of the father over his children which is at the root of incest. Ecclesiology should rethink the clericalism and highly hierarchical structure of the Church that confirms patriarchy's concentration of power and privilege in the hands of men and leads to the control and subordination of women even to the extent of violence.

Moral Theology should come out with a categorical condemnation of violence against women and children as sins crying out to heaven for vengeance. Such violence is a sin against the fifth, sixth, and ninth commandments. These are sins that demand redress as condition for forgiveness.

Sacramental Theology should radically review its teaching on Christian marriage. It should stop emphasizing obedience as the fundamental attitude of wife to husband. It should not insist that she should be subservient to him "in all things." It should stop idealizing women performing stereotyped roles and condemning them when they deviate from these roles. While exhorting couples to build homes of security and peace, marriage counselors should also point out the potential and the actuality of violence in the homes. Studies have proven that rape, violence, and other forms of sexual harassment happen more often in the home than in any other place. The Social Affairs Committee of the Assembly of Quebec Bishops furthermore points out a certain discourse in marriage that should be eradicated:

*A certain discourse within the Church sacrifices persons for the sake of the conjugal bond when it seeks to maintain the conjugal union "for better or for the worse," by exhorting women to forgive endlessly and often unconditionally, and forever to make peace in the name of a mystical ideal which is very difficult to attain. All the resource persons we consulted, who were with victims of violence, have made this observation.*

A Heritage of Violence, p. 40.

Missiology should not only paint the glorious achievements of the missionaries but also should mention with critique the violence, physical and sexual, to indigenous women in all the colonies perpetrated by the conquering armies. It should also objectively analyze the impact of Christianity on the traditional values of the conquered society and see how women in matriarchal or egalitarian societies had been domesticated to conform to the ideals of "Christian women."

Students of Church History should document the conditioning of women's consciousness throughout the centuries. The Church should make a public confession of guilt and repentance for ecclesiastical misogyny and for the violence done to women during the Inquisition.

## PASTORAL CONSEQUENCES

Pastoral Theology, above all the others, needs to concern itself with this appalling victimization of women and children. The statement by the Catholic Canadian Conference of Bishops (CCCCB) "To Live Without Fear" lists some harmful pastoral approaches to violence against women.

The first of these is "being uninformed." Even when surrounded by reports of violence, ministers do not seem to understand the complex dynamics of domestic violence and are not prepared to discern signs of abuse among the people they are counseling.

The second is "premature reconciliation." Religious counselors are so concerned about the preservation of the marriage that they hardly register the very real pain, suffering, and danger of the victim. The problem is not really resolved, so there are many cases of repeated and continuous wife-battering.

The third is "silence." The bishops write: "The abused woman is often very isolated, [and the] church may be the one place she is still able to go. If she never hears a homily on this topic, her sense of isolation may be increased or she may not feel free to approach the pastor or a member of the pastoral team." (p. 2.)

The last harmful approach is "misuse of Scripture." The Bible has been used throughout the centuries to rationalize and justify the oppression of women, but the Canadian bishops categorically say that "the misuse of scripture to justify the domination of women is unacceptable." (p. 2)

The Bishops enumerate helpful approaches, such as:

- \_taking the woman (I add: also the incest victim) seriously when she discloses abuse
- \_avoiding sentimental cliches
- \_following up after the initial contact
- \_acquiring the ability to detect abuse and becoming informed of the available community resources
- \_being ready to deal with the profound spiritual questions that arise concerning the women's relationship with God (especially, may I add, the questions of an incest victim who understandably recoils at being told to relate to God as Father)
- \_creating a parish atmosphere where clergy and laity can discuss the question of violence against women and children openly and sensitively, (p. 3)

The bishops go on and list concrete and helpful means of preventing violence against women, such as: catechetical programs and marriage-preparation programs that teach equality of persons support of social policies and programs that address the problem encouraging theologians and other scholars to reflect and write on the root causes of violence against women and children involvement of women in training seminarians who can give them formation on gender equality and dynamics of domestic violence

## **Towards A Spirituality For life**

Violence against women is an orientation towards death and destruction. Women should develop a spirituality for life. For me, this means: a spirituality of self-affirmation, a spirituality of empowerment, and a spirituality of inner freedom.

A spirituality of self-affirmation is the recognition of women of their worth and dignity. They are made in the image and likeness of God, just as men are. They are temples of the Holy Spirit. If women are so regarded by themselves and by men and society, how can there be incest, rape, and wife-battering? Women must learn to affirm themselves and to make others see their worth. This is against all their previous conditioning that they are mere sex objects or that they have no role in public life. They must get rid of all false humility, of victim consciousness, of feeling worth only in relation to men. They have to learn to be autonomous subjects. They have to decide according to what they think is right and not to conform to laws and regulations for the sake of conformity.

A spirituality of empowerment is the discovery of the power within us. Violence against women is a matter of power. It is the imposition of the powerful against the powerless. Women must realize that they are not helpless or weak. They have an inexhaustible source of inner strength. Even in their victimization, the woman survivors feel this unquenchable urge to survive, and they must utilize this to the full. This should give them the courage to struggle against injustice, discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. They have to empower one another so as to have the power to confront patriarchal power. Mutual empowerment is a must for women. It is the hope of transforming unjust enmities, career rivalries, and other forces that divide them.

A spirituality of inner freedom means freedom from fear, from idols, and from bitterness and resentment. The psychological basis for this is self-knowledge and self-acceptance. As long as we do not know and accept ourselves, we will never free our inner slaveries. And three of the strongest shackles of the spirit are fears, idols, and bitterness. Freedom from fear does not mean not feeling fear. It is the ability to discriminate between the unfounded fear and substantiated fear, because one is committed to a cause bigger than oneself. Idols are either negative or positive. Negative idols are those that exert so much negative pressure on us that we are paralyzed to act. Positive idols are those on whom we have either an emotional or intellectual dependence, and therefore also cripple our development of our subjective autonomy. We have to demythologize the power people have over us. To a certain extent, we have the ability to disempower them in proportion to our recognition of our worth dignity. Finally, even if we have the right to feel bitter and resentful because of negative experiences, we have to exorcise ourselves of this poisoning of our spirit. It is only then that we can be creative and productive.

There are many things that we cannot change or control in our life. But we still have the power to see how these will affect our lives. This reminds me of the Zen koan about the Chinese calligrapher. Painting in the West means to pin down the paper so one can draw freely. The Chinese calligrapher follows the movement of the paper. The paper cannot be controlled, but the artist can still create a beautiful work of art in relation to its movement. This is the artistry of life. This is the spirituality of life.

As women theologians, we are challenged to confront the issue of violence against women and children. Our sisters in the women's movement have gone ahead using their scholarship and commitment to eradicate this condition in our society. We have to add our own efforts to theirs, so there will come a time when half of humanity will no longer be the victims or potential victims of the other half. Only then can we have a humane, healthy, and creative society.



## Reading 10

Aruna Gnanadason, "Facing the Reality" In *No Longer Secret: The Church and Violence against Women*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993. pp.1-22.

*"Go back to him... learn how to adjust to his moods... don't do anything that would provoke his anger... Christ suffered and died for you on the Cross... Can't you bear some suffering too'."*

This is a voice of the church — the words of a priest counselling a woman who was being battered by her husband every single day of her married life. She went to the church for refuge and for moral and spiritual support. What she received instead was advice to learn submissive-ness and obedience in a distorted relationship and an abusive marriage.

The response to women's cries for justice and fair treatment is not always so heartless. There are occasions when women have experienced the caring concern of a community of Christians. There are exceptional examples of radical actions of solidarity taken by the church. But by and large, the churches around the world have remained silent about violence against women. Too often it is treated as a marginal concern, relegated to the attention of *women* in the church, not recognized as an issue central to the church's life and witness because of its deep and dehumanizing effects on the lives of women in the community.

When women live in violent contexts or in constant fear it has a deleterious effect on the development of societies as a whole. Unfortunately, this is not taken as seriously as it should be by either the church or other institutions in society. MATCH, a Canadian nongovernmental organization, concludes that:

*Violent acts against women the world over attack their dignity as human beings and leave them vulnerable and tearful. Conditioned to undervalue their skills and abilities and paralyzed by real fears of violence and retribution, women are marginalized in society and forced out of decision-making processes which shape and determine the development of their communities.'*

Women have to be able to participate fully in their country's plans, policies and programmes if development is to take place. As long as they are stifled in their participation by fear of violence, as long as they are reluctant to take up leadership positions because they are subject to physical or emotional abuse, the progress of whole populations will suffer.

It is the denial of this truth and the church's failure to offer adequate support or a concerted response that have prompted women around the world to raise the issue of violence against them as a priority area on the agenda of the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998). With alarming consistency, women from all regions of the world are identifying the various forms of violence they live with and calling on the church to respond.

### Identifying the forms of violence

It should be recognized that women have begun to speak out their pain only in recent times. For centuries, violence against women has been one of the world's best kept secrets. Even today, published statistics from around the world on crimes against women do not reflect the full picture since they refer only to *reported* incidents of violence. Within the very male-dominated contexts of all societies, much

violence against women goes unreported. Moreover, at every stage — from the family to the church to the police to the law courts — the understanding of "violence" excludes or ignores many forms of emotional, psychological and physical abuse that women experience.

No region or country is exempt from expressions of violence against women. Statistics collected by the New York-based International Women's Tribune Centre from women around the world are staggering, to say the least. -

— In Costa Rica, one of every two women can expect to be a victim of violence at some point in her life.

— In Jamaica, where rape is not a criminal offence. 1088 cases of rape and carnal abuse were reported in 1989.

— In Canada, one in four women can expect to be assaulted at some point in their lives, half of these before the age of 17.

— According to UN reports, India leads the world in "custodial" rape (rape committed by men in positions of power such as police officers, prison and hospital staff, doctors).

— In the US, a woman is beaten every 15 seconds; every six minutes a rape occurs; every day four women are killed by their batterers.

— A report by the Mexican Federation of Women's Trade Unions says that 95 percent of Mexican women workers are victims of sexual harassment in their workplaces.

— Three-quarters of the women interviewed in an International Labour Office (ILO) study of plantation workers in Sri Lanka said they had been beaten by their husbands or estate superintendents.

— In the Philippines, one out of every two women arrested by the military is forced to undress, according to a study on rape by the military. Fourteen percent reported that they were slapped, boxed or severely mauled; another 14 percent were harassed and threatened with rape or death.

— In Peru, one of every four girl children will be the victim of sexual abuse before she reaches her sixteenth birthday, and a third of all adult women report that they have been forced to have sex against their will. Many other sources provide evidence of equally horrifying proportions. *African Wmnun* tells the story of eleven women who were raped by soldiers in April 1991 while they were being held with thousands of other civilians in Uganda for identity checks and questioning.<sup>3</sup> The picture is clear: all over the world women are being brutalized and violated.

Recent research points to an even more frightening trend: women belong to an "endangered species". On the basis of demographic statistics from around the world, Harvard economist Amartya Sen estimates that the number of females "missing" due to biases against them could well be over 100 million. One reason for this shortfall is that girls are not allowed to benefit as much as boys from improvements in health care and nutrition that are lowering death rates. Under normal circumstances, from 5 to 6 percent more boys than girls are born; and at every age thereafter males die at higher rates than females. In the US, Britain and Poland, for example, there are about 105 females to every 100 males. In India, by contrast, the 1991 census showed that there are only 92.9 females to every 100 males, down from 93.4 in 1981. The 1990 census in China found just 93.8 females to every 100 males, compared with 94.1 at the time of the 1982 census. These and similar statistics from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Turkey found in the United Nations 1991 report on "The World's Women" confirm that in many countries, the ratio between women and men is decreasing.<sup>4</sup> This form of violence against women cannot be ignored.

### **The roots of the problem**

It is necessary to unearth the roots of the violence to which women are exposed if we are to combat it effectively. In recent years, women have used the term "patriarchy" to articulate one understanding of existing unequal power relations in the world, and to describe the violence that women face in their homes, in the workplace and elsewhere in society. Such violence is seen as an expression

of the wider violent and militarized context of the world in which we live. Patriarchy is identified as a system of "graded subjugation" in which some have power over others. This power can be manifested in economic, political, social or cultural terms.

The new definition, which goes beyond how the church has traditionally understood the term "patriarchy," underscores the fact that men in all societies have an unfair edge over women. It is true that it is not only women who live in violence but all people on the fringes of society — men, women and children, the "little ones" of this world, who live without power under the shadow of death-dealing forces. But in all contexts, women are the primary victims.

Crisis points in the world manifest the general culture of violence and militarism pervading political, economic, social and cultural life in every region. Global economic and social structures create the atmosphere for unequal power relations between and within nations. This engineers inequalities and keeps intact the atmosphere of violence of which women are special targets.

In every society, they are the most vulnerable and, along with children, the ones who bear the brunt of the world's injustice. Their sexuality is exploited, as is evident from the image of women projected in the media. Their labour is exploited, and any crisis in the economic structure hits women first. Women in the South suffer tremendous hardship working long hours in unhealthy and and unhygienic surroundings. They eke out a living in squatter settlements and slums and as the rural poor, lacking basic amenities, nutrition, health care, maternity and child care facilities. Women have always been viewed as a reserve army of cheap and docile labour. The recession and cutbacks on social welfare spending affect the lives of women in the North as well, particularly single mothers, migrants and refugee women and workers in poorly paid jobs. There is no doubt that in all our societies, women are the poorest of the poor and the most economically marginalized, unfairly burdened by the current global economic crisis.

What is even more insidious is that the violence women experience is considered to be secondary to the other forms of violence prevalent in the world. But it cannot be denied that "sexism kills". According to the well-known crusader against gender violence, Charlotte Bunch, "there is increasing documentation of the many ways in which being female is life-threatening," and a woman is unsafe at every stage of life, even before she is born.<sup>5</sup>

Bunch provides a number of examples to illustrate her point. *Before birth*, the medical procedure of amniocentesis continues to be used solely to determine the sex of the foetus, leading to widespread abortion of female fetuses, particularly in China and India, where more males than females are born even though natural birth ratios would produce more females. *During childhood*, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports, girls in many countries are fed less, breast-fed for shorter periods of time, taken to doctors less frequently than boys. As a result, girls are physically and mentally maimed by malnutrition or die at higher rates than boys, Bunch says, the denial of women's right to control their reproductive capacities threatens their lives, especially where it is combined with poverty and poor health services.

It is thus evident that the increased incidence of such violence against women as wife-beating, rape and dowry deaths cannot be dealt with as only crime statistics or dismissed as individual aberrations of demented males (though there are frequent examples of men who are passing through some deep psychological crisis going on a rampage of violence against women). Most incidents of violence are manifestations of social structures that perpetuate personal and systemic injustice.

Whatever its form, violence has its roots in distorted power relations. Patriarchal violence has not been adequately understood nor acknowledged as a necessary framework for analyzing structural inequalities in society. Yet unless there is a shift in the way unequal power relations are defined and a challenge to concepts that legitimize the imbalance of power in the hands of a few, who are largely males, there is no way to tackle the (systemic roots of the violence against women, nor to respond adequately to individual incidents. This still remains an open challenge.

Women have attributed the increased violence of the past two decades to a "backlash" against the women's movement. There has been resistance to the organized voices of women and their

determination to speak out against all that oppresses them, and serious attempts to undermine women's struggles for basic human rights. One way in which this is done is to develop a sophisticated methodology of control, including the use of force, to "teach women a lesson" so that they will know better than to rebel or question their status and position.

Violence in the lives of women may take blatant forms. Or it may be subtle. In either case, it eats into women's psyches, demoralizing them and lowering their self-esteem. To categorize the specific forms of violence women face as "overt" or "covert" is not to imply that there are some forms of violence which are "private" and therefore can be resisted in an isolated manner. All violence against women has systemic roots. The categories described below are not rigid, because they are interrelated. Nor is the list exhaustive; it is rather an attempt to identify and describe some expressions of violence.

## **Overt forms of violence**

### *Violence in the domestic sphere*

In the past, it was often virtually impossible to know what happened inside the family home, but since women have dared to speak out their pain, this information is no longer secret. Even so, statistics on crime in the public sphere attract more attention than figures on violence in the home. People tend to fear danger in the streets and lament and condemn rising crime rates in society, but often ignore the reality of abuse in the home.

As the truth about domestic violence is revealed, it is becoming indisputable that women and children are not necessarily safe even in the apparent security of their homes. In many contexts all over the world, the family, far from being a place where men, women and children live in an atmosphere of shared understanding, respect and love, has supported patriarchal forms of domination and power. The culture of patriarchal domination and violent retribution against any expression of what the dominant person considers rebellion or dissent finds expression in various forms of physical and sexual abuse of women by men in their homes in all societies and among all peoples.

In a bid to preserve the myth that the family is and always will be a safe unit within the community, many people prefer not to pay attention to the startling details of violence in the family now emerging.

In many societies, it is considered "normal" if a man beats his wife, even by most medical health professionals. However, if a woman dares to retaliate with violence she is treated as "mentally abnormal". Only recently have medical professionals recognized the existence of the "battered wife syndrome", a term coined by a US psychologist in 1984 to explain the behaviour of abused victims.

Tolerance of domestic violence manifests itself in warped cultural practices and attitudes. There is an old Hindi saying: "A woman is like spit. Once spat out. she cannot be taken back." In many Asian societies, a woman is conditioned from the moment she is born into accepting that her only purpose in life is to be married and to stay married at all costs. This implies submissiveness to a man no matter how cruel or violent he may be. Most societies have similar written or unwritten expectations of women.

For social workers, lawyers and counsellors trying to deal with domestic violence, one of its most perplexing and difficult features is the inability of many abused women to make a break from their violent home environment because they are bound by strong emotional ties to the abuser. Studies show that battered women tend to return to a violent relationship many times over before leaving for good and making their lives in a safe environment. In many cases, a woman is unable to name the violence in her life. Maybe she is too proud to acknowledge that her marriage is not working. Maybe she is hoping against hope that the repeated promises her husband makes to desist from violence will be kept.

Domestic violence takes many forms, including intimidation and threats, economic deprivation, psychological and sexual abuse, often used repeatedly. Physical violence is one tactic used. It may take the form of a single attack, but is often frequent and in some cases even daily. The assumption that such violence happen; only among poor and uneducated people or in "dysfunctional"

families is a myth. Studies show that a man who regularly batters his wife or partner and children may be: perfect "gentleman" outside the home. He may be a doctor, minister, lawyer, psychologist, teacher or other professional who would never be violent to other men or women in the public sphere. He can control himself outside, but picks a safe target inside the home.

In no context do women "ask" to be beaten or abused. It should be added that in over 95 percent of domestic assaults, the man is the assailant. There are rare cases in which a woman batters a man and women have been known to retaliate and sometimes even kill their attacker after prolonged years of battering. But violence in the home is overwhelmingly by men against women.

Statistics are available in plenty:

— In South Africa, one adult woman out of every six is assaulted regularly by her mate. In almost half of these cases, the man involved also abuses the woman's children.

— In France, 95 percent of the victims of violence are women, 51 percent of them at the hands of the husbands

— In Papua New Guinea, 60 percent of the persons murdered in 1981 were women, the majority by their spouses during or after a domestic argument.

— In the USA, violence occurs at least once in 67 percent of all marriages.

— In cases of sexual abuse of children in Canada, most assailants are either family members or persons in a position of trust, according to a 1981 survey." In most societies, the demands of new economic and social realities are changing the role expectations of both men and women. Nevertheless, some old patterns are not easy to get rid of. Even women who have full-time paid jobs outside of the home are expected in most contexts to depend on men socially and economically, while men continue to be dependent on women for domestic services, including a kind of psycho-emotional support sometimes referred to as "tension management". It continues to be the woman's responsibility to create a home atmosphere that will help men to deal with the pressures of the workplace.

As a Canadian church report notes:

*The role of tension manager is the domestic task that leaves a woman most vulnerable to violence from her male partner. In fact, violence against women can be seen as an extreme form of tension management in which a woman absorbs with her body and soul tensions generated- in the public sphere — tensions which could otherwise be directed in protest against oppression from the established order.'*

### *Sexual harassment*

Like rape, sexual harassment has been a hidden problem, treated as a joke or blamed on the victim herself. Because of a long history of silence on the subject, many women feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or ashamed when they talk of personal incidents of harassment. They are afraid that it will reflect badly on their character or that they will be seen as somehow inviting the proposition"

A clear and comprehensive definition of sexual harassment has been provided by the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA. It refers to "an unwanted sexual advance or demands (verbal/physical which are perceived by the recipient as demeaning intimidating or coercive". Sexual contact that is unwanted in the *perception of the recipient* is therefore to be treated as sexual harassment. The need for a more accurate definition of what constitutes sexual harassment arises from the fact that in many countries, the law courts has been ambivalent about it. Only recently has sexual harassment come to be recognized as a form of violence.

In the past, women did not have the courage I challenge the daily irritation experienced at the hands of people with authority over them, particularly in the worst place. Nor would they have defined this as sexual harassment. But due to the impact of the women's movement more and more women in many societies now refuse to be treated as objects. Recognizing how much it affects the humanity and dignity, they are no longer able to accept harassment without protest.

But it is also true that most women would still prefer to cultivate an immune system that makes them apparently indifferent to any assault on their sensibilities — verbal psychological or physical. The motto continues to be pretend nothing happened rather than go through a process that could cause a great deal of personal agony. Women are not sure that they will be believed if they complain (sexual harassment). They may be ridiculed for being prudish or oversensitive, or even blamed for provoking unwanted behaviour. The consequences on their private lives and family situations can be devastating. In most cases, they would rather not speak out because to do so, may cost them their jobs. In most societies, laws to protect women are far from adequate. It is difficult to prove that woman's modesty and psyche have been wounded by inappropriate words or actions.

The preliminary findings of a 1992 research project instituted by the Swiss government office for equality between women and men, confirms just how widespread the problem is. The survey included a detailed interview of 558 women working in 25 different companies and agencies in Geneva. Of the women interrogated, 59 percent affirmed that (they had been sexually harassed at work in the preceding two years. Seventy-one percent of these said the harassment had occurred more than once, and 87 percent of those said the same man had harassed them.

Among the causes for complaint were inappropriate comments about women (35 percent), colleagues' attitudes which caused embarrassment (30 percent), ambiguous or embarrassing comments (19 percent), colleagues showing them pornographic material or leaving it out on display (16 percent), unwanted touching (14 percent), sexual blackmail (2 percent), imposed sexual relations (0.7 percent), physical violence (0.4 percent), and rape or attempted rape (0.2 percent). For 81 percent of the women who experienced sexual harassment, the disagreeable situation lasted for more than a year; of these 16 percent complained of daily harassment for more than a year.

Sexual harassment and fear of it exert social control on women. Research has revealed that women unable to act or behave as they wish adopt "self-censuring" behaviour. Women in all situations impose restrictions of time, space, and movement on themselves because they must always be on guard. At the same time, the non-recognition of sexual harassment as a social reality contributes to the maintenance of silence on the subject. The effect is to lead women to believe that sexual harassment is an integral and inevitable part of their work conditions."

Trade unions have not yet been able to deal with incidents of sexual harassment as "crimes against working women", although many studies have shown that the majority of working women experience some degree of harassment at some stage of their working lives.

A few years ago, a group of women brought a case of harassment to the attention of the leading trade union in a nationalized bank in Bangalore, India: a man had slapped a woman colleague at work. The union declined to take up the case, saying it was a personal matter between the woman and man concerned and needed to be dealt with in that way.

An International Labour Office (ILO) report on sexual harassment shows just how widespread and global the problem is. But ILO civil rights lawyer Constance Thomas admits that the attempt to examine the scope of sexual harassment in third-world worksites has only now begun. "We think we are going to find an even more serious problem there." she acknowledged. "

### *Rape*

The issue of rape has recently received increased attention in connection with its incidence in wars and conflict situations. The use of women's bodies as weapons in conflict causes revulsion in the minds of all right-thinking people. What it does to the psyche of women who are its victims can never be fully understood or adequately responded to. But despite this awareness of the deep wounds caused, there are still attempts to underestimate or deny the seriousness of this crime. As a brochure from a feminist group in Bangalore, India, points out:

*Rape, which is the most aggressive demonstration of unjust power relationships, as a form of personal violence, is physical assault and symbolic of the degradation of womankind, but is a violation of the most sensitive part of the female psyche. Susan Brownmiller defines it as a "conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear". It is only of late that rape is being viewed as a criminal attack against an individual and specifically a woman. Otherwise, the shocking sentiment implicit even today in the law, besides the attitude of society, is that a woman "asks for it", or in a spirit of condonation states that a rapist is an individual giving in to his natural virility!"*

Old assumptions and attitudes die hard. Some years ago, the chief minister of an Indian state complained that the media were blowing attacks on women tourists out of proportion. "What is rape after all?" he asked at a public meeting, adding: "In America a rape occurs every minute. It is as common as drinking tea. One drinks tea and commits a rape."<sup>2</sup>

In July 1991, 271 teenage girls were attacked by male classmates at a boarding school in Kenya because they refused to join a strike against the school authorities. Nineteen girls died of suffocation as they tried to hide, and 71 were raped. The comment by the school's deputy principal was revealing: "The boys never meant any harm against the girls." he asserted. "They just wanted to rape." The editor of Kenya's *Weekly Review*, however, condemned the incident:

*The tragedy has underscored the abominable male chauvinism that dominates Kenyan social life. The lot of our women and girls is lamentable. We treat them as second-class beings, good only for sexual gratification or burdensome chores. We bring up our boys to have little or no respect for girls.<sup>ii</sup>*

Attitudes such as that of the Indian government minister, the Kenyan educator or the man who shot dead 14 young women at the University of Montreal in 1989 because, he said, they were feminists, may be extreme and isolated reactions, but they unfortunately reflect some old and universal assumptions and attitudes. No real change will be achieved unless these are exposed and radically changed. In many countries, law courts have excused perpetrators of crimes against women on the grounds of the woman's past history. From logic it follows that there are some women who can never be raped!

*Rape as a weapon of war*

The most brutal part of the build-up of private methods of control to repress people's protest

movements in many societies is the increasing incidence of sexual violence against women. Newspaper reports of war and other conflict situations, police action or military intervention often include the phrase "and many women were raped". Mass rape has frequently been used as a political or military weapon either to punish or to intimidate those who rebel. The logic here is to hurt the women in order to teach the men a lesson.

More than forty years after World War II, hundreds of women in Korea, the Philippines and other countries are speaking out about the systematic abuse they experienced at the hands of Japanese soldiers during the war. These women were kidnapped and used as "comfort women" for the soldiers' pleasure. Only now have they finally asserted their right to protest that deep humiliation and to demand financial compensation. But, as a Dutch woman testifying in 1992 to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva said, the deep and lasting psychological damage sustained can never really be compensated for or erased. Courageous enough to speak out as one of the victims of this forced prostitution, the woman concluded her statement by asserting that "I have the right, after almost 50 years, not to forgive all those who caused all the pain."

Rape has often been considered as a "normal by product" of war. An *International Herald Tribune* editorial (8 December 1992) put it starkly: "All wars are alike in at least three particulars: death, destruction and rape." The comment points to the matter-of-fact attitude with which brutality against women in any conflict situation is viewed.

This hard reality hit the world with fresh force in reports emerging in 1992 from the war in the former Yugoslavia. Rape as an inevitable part of the war was openly acknowledged by all sides in the conflict. This *International Herald Tribune* editorial mentioned above aptly titled "The rape of Bosnia", was written in that context. It quotes a *New York Times* interview with a Serbian fighter, who explained that his commanders had advised him and his companions that raping Muslim women was "good for raising a fighter's morale", and that he had followed their advice several times at a motel used as a prison for Muslim women. He also claimed that he and his fellow fighters routinely killed the women afterwards.

Ecumenical teams of women who visited the former Yugoslavia in 1992 confirmed the veracity of such accounts, as did delegations from the European Community, Amnesty International and the UN Human Rights Commission. Evidence of systematic mass rape as part of the military strategy there was picked up by the media and caused consternation around the world. Not all the raped women were killed, however. Many survived and went to refugee camps around the divided country, and a few were able to tell the world of their pain. In the framework of the "ethnic cleansing" strategy, some had been detained for at least five months after being made pregnant, by which time abortion was illegal. New expressions like "frontline" and "third-party rape", describing public rape as a means of intimidating and demoralizing enemy forces, have been added to the jargon of warfare. Like other weapons, rape too is becoming more sophisticated!

Article 27, paragraph 2 of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War (adopted in 1949) classifies wartime rape as a serious



human rights violation. It states that "women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault." In an agreement reached under the auspices of the International Red Cross, all parties in the Yugoslavia conflict undertook to comply with the Convention. Yet the law has been flouted with impunity. Women are demanding the implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention in order to ensure that rape is considered a war crime. Women who are dehumanized and violated in this and other wars cannot wait another forty years before justice is done!

Amnesty International reports the rape of political prisoners and women imprisoned in conflict situations in India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Liberia, Mauritius, Uganda, Senegal, Peru, Guatemala, Mexico, Turkey, Greece, Ireland, and Palestine. The report stipulates that:

*Through their failure to institute adequate investigations, prosecutions and procedural safeguards, governments around the world bear full responsibility for the persistence of widespread rape and sexual abuse in custody. Women are entitled to the protection of their fundamental human rights. But many governments clearly regard rape and sexual assault as less serious offences than other human rights violations. This is a particularly frightening prospect when the perpetrators of these rapes are the same policemen and military personnel charged with the protection of the public.<sup>14</sup>*

#### *Prostitution*

Prostitution, particularly related to tourism, is now being recognized not only as a grave affront to women's being and psyche but also as a form of violence against women. Poor women tend to be the victims of its most ugly and dehumanizing manifestations. The link between prostitution and global economic injustice and the market economy is increasingly recognized, and it was recently said that a poor nation's most marketable commodity is its women, although statistics show that it is now *children* — the most fragile, unorganized and thus exploitable human beings — who are the main targets of prostitution. Writes Jean Fernand-Laureni, the rapporteur of a 1983 UN Economic and Social Council study on the sex trade:

*The movement involves the traffic of poor women towards rich men in all directions. Economic structural adjustment and loan repayments are causing much anguish to people in the South. Thirty-seven percent of the Philippines annual budget flows from the country to service debts, while poverty is such that 21,000 women work as prostitutes around the US Subic naval base. In situations of poverty, women and children are the first to suffer, and therefore also to seek desperate survival strategies. The sex industry has rapidly become international, profiting from this vulnerability.'*

In Belgium, for example, an estimated 2000 women are illegally employed in cabarets, and their numbers are rising each year. Of the 1430 work permits granted to "artistes" in Flanders in 1990, 968 were for "go-go" dancers, of whom 290 were from the Dominican Republic, 228 from the Philippines, 77 from Thailand, 42 from Brazil, 34 from Romania, and 30 from the former USSR. Social workers estimate that 30-50 percent of prostitutes in Belgium are non-Europeans. Sex tourism is the flip side of the coin: each year, 10,000 Belgian men travel as sex tourists to Pattaya in Thailand.

A study commissioned by the German government ministry for women shows that of the 222,000 German tourists who travelled to Thailand in 1989, seven out of ten were men and between 50 and 70 percent of them were travelling to Thailand exclusively for sex purposes.

Although prostitution is treated as a crime for foreign women in Germany, roughly half of the country's 2-400,000 prostitutes, in the big cities at least, are non-Germans. Previously they came mainly from Thailand but, over the last three years, more Latin American women have been working as prostitutes in Frankfurt, while women from Poland, the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary are doing likewise in Hamburg and Berlin.

Many of the estimated 20,000 prostitutes in the Netherlands are also foreign women. The Dutch government is developing new policy guidelines on the sex industry and has set up a support centre called the Stichting Tegen Vrouwenhandel (STV). Of the 168 women aged from 16-39 who contacted the centre between 1989 and 1991, 47 were Dominicans, 38 Filipinas, 37 from Thailand, 9 from Poland, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

A "Frauen Informationszentrum", an organization working with prostitutes and abused women in Switzerland, counselled 132 women in 1990. Of these 32 were from Brazil, 29 from the Dominican Republic, 25 from Thailand, 7 from Kenya, 6 from the Philippines. Women also came from as far afield as Eritrea, Mozambique, Tahiti, Uganda, Cuba and Colombia. A 1991 study estimates that each year, 25-30,000 Swiss men travelling abroad will indulge in sexual relations with child prostitutes.

Child prostitution is on the increase all over the world. There are estimated to be up to several hundreds of thousands of prostitutes under the age of 16 in Thailand, for example.<sup>16</sup> In many parts of the world, child prostitutes are drawn mainly from indigenous populations. Nearly one-third of the child prostitutes in Taiwan, for instance, are from indigenous communities despite the fact that only 2 percent of the total population are indigenous.<sup>17</sup>

A letter from a Thai child prostitute expresses the pain of millions of girl children being inducted into the sex trade every day:

*Dear Daddy and Mom.*

*I write to you because I miss you... I am not working as a servant, but as a prostitute. Each day I must serve 7-8 men. I can get diseases like VD, TB, AIDS, etc. They threaten to beat me up if I don't do it. They beat up girls who refused them, until they died. they won't take us to be treated because they are afraid that we will run away. Instead they give us two or three tablets... Being a prostitute is like being a bird in a cage. They can't fly away."*

### **Mail-order brides**

These are women from poorer nations who are sold as brides, to men in Europe and Australia in particular. The practice is now being recognized as a new form of violence against women. Women from the South are advertised as "exotic, graceful, beautiful, loyal, reliable," but also "submissive, good with children, not too independent, from a socially stable environment, morally old-fashioned but with a modern outlook, and protected with a health certificate"! Describing its "merchandise", a British marriage bureau promised that "in selecting a Filipina, you could expect her to be passionate yet faithful, loving and caring, hard-working and with none of the hangups in attitudes prevalent in European women."<sup>11/</sup>

In 1987, some 200 German agencies were advertising mail-order brides.-" Marriage bureaus make use of the three-month tourist visa to bring women picked from a catalogue to Germany, Several agencies then offer a "trial period" before a final decision is reached! Prices vary considerably depending on the woman's country of origin. Central

and eastern European women are available at the cheapest rate. A Munich agency charges 3500 marks to make contact with a woman from Hungary, Bulgaria or the former Czechoslovakia, and includes her travel costs. If the client does not want to marry her within six months, 50 percent of the fee is returned.

Swiss agencies also offer mail-order bride services and men may also return the women should they prove "unsuitable". It costs between 5-7000 Swiss francs — what one would pay for a good second-hand car — to order a wife from the Philippines. Half of the 28 mailorder brides who sought counsel at the Frauen Informationszentrum in 1989 were being subjected to violence and abuse. Of these 22 had to be treated for injuries resulting from beatings, and had been sexually abused and/or raped.

Other forms of violence that deeply affect the well-being and even survival of women in different contexts are being identified. Among them are some medical techniques, including the invasive power of reproductive technologies, the sex-specific torture of women prisoners, violent attacks on female political and human rights activists, incest and other forms of child abuse including female infanticide, dowry-related violence and even murder, cultural practices like female circumcision and self-immolation by widows, ritual abuse particularly of girl children and the continuing practice of witch-hunting, distorted images of women in the media, advertising and pornography, gang rapes and rape in marriage. Women of colour and other women exposed to rising racial hatred and discrimination are the particular targets of violence. In a recent interview, Dalit women's activist Ruth Manorama said that more than 80 percent of women raped in India are from this oppressed community.

### **Covert forms of violence**

There are more subtle and elusive forms of violence against women that cannot be counted in hard statistics. These include the living deaths millions of women face in their homes, workplaces and other social contexts where they are subjected to discriminatory and dehumanizing attitudes to them as women. Such attitudes may be expressed in cruel taunts and harassment that devalue women, denying their right to an opinion, suppressing their desires, locking them into the drudgery of domestic labour, and diminishing their creativity and self-esteem.

Such covert violence is rarely taken seriously. Women are advised not to "over-react" to what are considered "normal" attitudes and to behaviour that is sometimes said to be unconscious and not intended to cause discomfort or pain. But some women are asserting that any form of violence, be it verbal, psychological, emotional or physical, is dehumanizing and therefore unacceptable. They recognize that any attitude or behaviour that reduces women to the level of targets of abuse or harassment is violence. They are demanding that all forms of violence from the most blatant to the most subtle be challenged and combatted. Around the world, the women's movement has given them the courage and the space to articulate a vision of life free from violence, where all may contribute, and everyone's gifts may be respected and allowed to flourish.

## READING 11

Joan A. Filemoni-Tofaeono, "Cracking the Silence: The Churches' Role in Violence against Women in Oceania" *Ministerial Formation* – July 2004.

### CRACKING THE SILENCE: THE CHURCHES' ROLE IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN OCEANIA

Joan A. Filemoni-Tofaeono

#### Introduction

Violence is an issue of urgency in Oceania for the churches and their theological institutions.<sup>26</sup> It is one of the deadliest hu/man-made sicknesses and the cause of many afflictions in the world today, especially for women and children. Volumes of literature have been written internationally on this social ill from a Christian perspective.<sup>27</sup> Attempts have been made globally to eradicate this problem.<sup>28</sup> Yet the problem continues to spread like an incurable epidemic. It seems that it becomes more sophisticated in its manifestations as each year goes by. Human beings continuously come up with new means and forms of violence to conquer and control others.<sup>29</sup>

The first section of this paper examines the social reality of violence in the island communities of Oceania and the complex web of forces that contribute to the problem of domestic violence against women. The second section analyzes the problem by drawing on the experiences of victims and their families and raising questions regarding how these experiences should be viewed and responded to. The third section questions the role which theological education and the churches play in the problem. The final section will pinpoint clues for transformation that are helpful in the search to overcome domestic violence against women.

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<sup>26</sup> Social issues such as violence are almost never addressed nor included in the curriculum of theological institutes, at least in the Oceanian context. There is a mentality that they are issues for social services and civil societies and not for theological education.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance the writings of Marie M. Fortune, such as: *Family Violence: A Workshop Manual for Clerg)' and Other Helpers* (Seattle, \VA: Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1980);

Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1987); *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989); Marie Fortune and Carol Adams, eds., *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook* (New York: Continuum, 1995). See also Aruna Gnanadason, *No Longer a Secret: The Church and Violence Against Women*, 100

<sup>28</sup> For example, in an attempt to combat violence worldwide, the World Council of Churches launched Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) in February, 2001, in Potsdam, Germany. Many other care-giving services around the world have been actively involved in seeking means to eradicate this problem.

<sup>29</sup> The current and ongoing crisis in the northern hemisphere is just one example: The United States uses violence to counter violence. Terrorist acts are used to get a message across. These are done at the expense of the innocent and the vulnerable, who are predominantly women and children.

## **The living social reality of violence against women**

When asked to deliver a presentation on this topic at the World Congress of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCAT1), held in Chiang Mai, Thailand in December 8-13, 2002,<sup>1</sup> began with a rather shocking exercise designed to jolt everyone present into a deeper state of awareness. I asked everyone present who had been a victim of any kind of abuse or violence to stand or raise their hands. Then I asked anyone who had been a perpetrator of any kind of violence to do likewise. This was followed by a long moment of silence. This uncomfortable exercise confirmed my belief that each and every one of us has participated in violence at some time in our lives, either as a victim or a perpetrator. Even if we have not physically harmed another person, we still are perpetrators of violence in various forms in relation to the powerless and the marginalised in our midst.

The topic of violence is very broad and complicated. In most cultural settings it is enveloped in a shroud of shame and denial. In the above exercise at the Chiang Mai gathering, I noted to the audience that we had just experienced what it is like to be put on the spot in front of a respected group of well-known theologians. I felt sure some must have said to them, "How dare she ask us such a private question? Who does she think she is?"

Thus I followed up by asking the audience my own questions: "What was your inner reaction when you were asked to look at yourself and identify if you were a victim as well as a perpetrator of violence? Who among us here would like to reveal this dark side of our lives, especially in an academic setting such as this? If you felt that it was unnecessary to put you in such an extremely embarrassing and humiliating experience, can you imagine what it is like to hide the shame of being in an abusive relationship from the very people you know and live with? Can you now understand why many choose to keep such abuse in secrecy for a long time or forever? Do you also see the need for us to break our silence and do something about the violence within and around ourselves?"

Domestic violence is indeed pervasive in Oceania communities. It is sickening to read in Fiji's newspapers on a daily basis<sup>30</sup> about cases of violent sexuality brutality,<sup>31</sup> child molestation,<sup>32</sup> incest,<sup>33</sup> rape<sup>34</sup> and attempted rape,<sup>35</sup> especially within the family and

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<sup>30</sup> I am currently working in the Fiji Islands. It therefore makes sense to cite incidents reported in the Fiji media. The actual incidents presented in this paper are taken from the three Fijian newspapers: *The Fiji Times*, *Sun* and the *Daily Post*. I am in no way suggesting that this is the only island nation with an increase in such violence. Fiji is simply representative of the violence affecting all island nations and indeed the whole world.

<sup>31</sup> B is alleged to have raped a 24-year old American tourist while she was taking a walk... the victim was repeatedly raped at gunpoint during the night and was only able to escape after B fell asleep in the early morning. *The Daily Post*, September 12, 2002, 7.

<sup>32</sup> A villager was sentenced to 10 years... for sexually abusing eight children... between the ages of four and nine... The 64-year-old said he had reconciled with church elders and parents of the victims and was forgiven... *The Fiji Times*, June 28, 2002. 3. Avinesh Gopal, in her article "Child Molester Goes to Prison," reported that "A man was jailed for two years for indecently

against children<sup>36</sup> and women. The two most common and serious forms of violence are sexual<sup>37</sup> and domestic<sup>38</sup> violence. The incidence of such violence is clearly on the rise. For example, "Police statistics reveal reported sexual offences rose by 20 per cent this year compared to last year, with incest having the highest figure in the category. As of June last year, 218 cases of sexual offences were reported compared to 262 for the same period this year."<sup>39</sup> While the documentation I have cited comes from Fiji, this situation in Fiji is no doubt replicated all across Oceania. The true picture is also much more severe than the statistics indicate, as it is a well-known fact that the vast majority of cases of domestic violence are never reported to anyone, so what we hear about is only the tip of the iceberg.

There is unfortunately no space in this paper to address the seriousness of the problem of violence against children.<sup>40</sup> Nor will we be able to discuss the many forms and roots of

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assaulting his 10-year old neighbor... The accused had gone to the victim's house and told her to send her younger sister to a neighbor's house. When the victim's sister left, ... the accused then undressed the victim and touched her private parts. He also undressed himself, rubbed his private parts against the victim's thighs and left the house." *The Fiji Times*. April 24, 2002, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Sanday Gounder, a journalist for the *Fiji Sun* newspaper, wrote that "A Lautoka father who has allegedly sexually assaulting his two daughters yesterday pleaded guilty on rape and two counts of indecent assault before the Lautoka Magistrates Court." *Sun*. November 12, 2002, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Timoci Vula wrote an article headlining on the front page that the "Suva Magistrates Court yesterday jailed a 66-year-old grandfather found guilty of indecently assaulting and raping his two granddaughters over a period of 8 years." *The Daily Post*. Friday July 26, 2002. 1. ,

<sup>35</sup> A 37 year old man was yesterday sentenced to four years imprisonment for abducting a girl under the age of 18 years with intent to have carnal knowledge and indecently assaulting her... (he) confronted her by closing her mouth with his hand and dragged her to a nearby vacant house. At the house he forced her to remove her clothes, laid her down and touched her private parts. He took off his trousers and tried to have intercourse with her..." Charlotte Peters, "Sexual Offender Cops 4-year Term," *Sun*, November 12, 2002. 2.

<sup>36</sup> A (63 -year-old) man who indecently assaulted nine children (between the ages of four to eleven) was remanded in custody for his own safety after admitting the offences..." *The Fiji Times*, June 12, 2002, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Sakiasi Nawaikama, "Sex Cases on the Increase," *The Fiji Times*, April 22, 2002, 5. The reporter wrote, "'There is an increase in crimes of this nature (sexual assaults),' says Women's Crisis Center Coordinator Shameema Ali. ... She said the recent case of a man who raped his younger sister showed the serious level incest cases have reached. These cases have been there but they are beginning to come out because it's being talked about.....There is an increase in these sorts of acts against women."

<sup>38</sup> A domestic dispute between a couple living in a defacto relationship turned tragic when the man threw a punch intended for his wife. who was breastfeeding their three month-old son, that landed on the infant, killing him almost instantly." Tanya Me Cutchen "Drunken Dad kills son with one punch" *The Daily Post*. Monday October 14, 2002, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Imran Ami, "Father Under Probe for Sex Crimes" *The Fiji Times*, November 15, 2002, 3.

<sup>40</sup> A father raped his partially crippled daughter for a period of almost three weeks until she could not hide it anymore and broke the sick news to her mother... who then reported the matter to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. She (the victim) is partially crippled from the waist

violence. Rather, we will only focus on a discussion of domestic violence against women in Oceania, from a theological perspective. However, it should be highlighted 'that violence against children is just as serious a problem as violence against women, if not greater. Therefore, cases of abuse against children have been cited to indicate the seriousness of the problem.

The issue of domestic violence against women is very controversial when different perspectives are laid bare for discussion. This discussion seeks to get a point across and to disclose a painful but truthful fact that violence, especially domestic violence, is a problem affecting the lives of many women in the Pacific; and that the Pacific churches and theological institutions in Oceania need to break their silence and their passive behavior on the issue and do something about it.

### **Experiences of domestic violence in Oceania**

#### ***Case one***

Two young girls who were raped and assaulted by their father submitted letters of reconciliation in court. Proceedings at the Lautoka (Fiji) court were closed to the public after the 47-year-old man told the court that his daughters and wife had forgiven him and produced the letters... He said he was much stressed and in financial difficulty when he committed the offences. The alleged offences began almost six years ago when his elder daughter was 15 years old. He admitted raping his elder daughter and trying to rape and indecently assaulting the younger one, who was 12 years old. The matter came to light when the older daughter told a neighbor of the alleged incidences.<sup>41</sup>

#### ***Case two***

A 34-year-old soldier appeared before the Chief Magistrate... for assaulting his wife. The complainant approached the accused to discuss family problems. During the discussion an argument developed between the couple whereby the accused allegedly started punching the complainant. The complainant suffered injuries as a result and reported the matter to police.<sup>42</sup>

#### ***Case three***

A clergy couple was living at a theological institution that maintains a typical (for the region) hierarchical structure. The husband became a victim of this structure and its dirty politics. The ensuing stress affected the couple's relationship at home and their frustration was taken out on each other. One day their built-up

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down... This is probably the sickest and biggest sexual offence ever committed in Fiji." Raymond Singh. "Father Rapes Crippled Daughter." *The Daily Post*. October 2. 2002, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Seema Sharma, "Daughters Give Letters of Reconciliation," *The Fiji Times*, November 20, 2002, 5.

<sup>42</sup> *The Daily Post*. March 22. 2002, 3.

frustrations culminated in a verbal argument that ended in a fist fight. The wife reported the incident to the Principal, who met with the couple privately. The couple was told to go home, reconcile and pray about their problem. As soon as the couple left, the Principal shared this confidential incident with his closest confidantes, who in turn spread the matter as a gossip to their colleagues, friends and students at the College. The news of the gossip got back to the couple who then regretted going to the Principal for pastoral support, as it became a source of destruction rather than an agent of healing for them.<sup>43</sup>

Case one is only one example cited of the reported cases of sexual abuse a domestic violence in Oceania families. Many more cases remain unreported and are kept hidden in family closets. Most of those reported are incest cases where the perpetrators are either a brother, father, uncle, cousin, or grandfather. The victims of incest are as young as three months and as old as eighty-plus years old. Incest in Oceania has such an alarmingly accelerating growth rate that one questions if our communities are approaching collective insanity and are controlled by evil forces.

There is no doubt that most cases of incest are safely kept in secrecy to safeguard the name and the integrity of the family and the perpetrators, who are mostly family members or close friends and relatives. What about the integrity and the "being" of the children who have been ripped apart at the core of their existence? Victims are either forced to reconcile with the perpetrator, or the families seek a means of reconciling with each other without taking the children's feelings into consideration at all.

Case two speaks of an experience that many Pacific Islands women have in common. However, only a few have the courage to report such an assault to the police or to seek support from a care-giving agency. Most of the women have at one time, if not many times in their lives, experienced an assault resulting from a relationship, marital or de facto.<sup>44</sup> Men especially resort to physical violence<sup>45</sup> to "resolve" conflicts in relationships. In so doing, however, the relational problems are neither resolved nor dissolved. They only become suppressed, whereby one partner must bail out of a disagreement. It is most often the woman who is silenced in most disputes, through the use of domestic violence. The mere threat of a repeat of the violence is sufficient to keep her quiet, obedient and submissive.

Case three explains the inability and the un-preparedness of church leaders in the region's theological institutions to play their pastoral roles adequately when presented with real-life conflict situations, especially domestic violence. In this case the leaders were successful only in turning one family's dilemma into a topic for gossip. This is exactly the greatest fear of most women who are victims of domestic abuse in theological

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<sup>43</sup> The source wishes to remain anonymous.

<sup>44</sup> Often both partners contribute [o Hie misunderstandings in the marriage or a relationship. Both are victims of other forms of violence such as emotional, psychological or verbal violence. The issue here is not to discuss who or what caused the problem. The point is to stress that men are more prone to resort to physical violence to deal with relational difficulties. As a consequence, the women are almost always the victims of violent abuse.

<sup>45</sup> This is not to say that women are never perpetrators of violence, especially in its non-physical forms. There are also men who are victims of violent women. But they are a tiny minority (1:100) in comparison to female victims (9:10).



institutions: that their family problems will become only the source of juicy gossip for the community. Hence, the silence. Worst of all, hardly anyone offers to help or to raise domestic violence as a pastoral and theological problem that must be addressed and dealt with in theological institutions.

Domestic violence must no longer be viewed as something that goes away once the triggering dispute is over. It is a vicious cycle that continues sucking up victims and perpetrators in a vicious cycle as it moves from one generation to another. Perpetrators falsely believe that once the tears are dried and the bruises disappear the problem is also over. Victims internalise their woundedness and fear and remain silent.

There is now, however, a growing consciousness in at least a few Pacific Islanders that violence against women is a serious and unjustifiable ill affecting society at all levels in Oceania. There is a growing awareness that numerous factors have contributed to the increase of violence against women in Oceania, including growing social stress and instability in many island nations (which inevitably results in increased violence against women), greater exposure to violence in all forms of media, and the acceptance by the churches of the cultural patriarchy that condones male domination and control of women. As space does not allow for an elaboration of these factors, this work takes for granted the findings of social commentators that the problem of violence against women is pervasive and worsening. Our focus is on the fact that the churches, and specifically their theological institutions, have indirectly contributed to a climate that tolerates violence against women, particularly through misinterpretations of the Bible.

### **The role of theological education and the church in violence against women**

It is a growing concern for many Oceanian women, and a few men as well, that the Oceanian churches and theological institutions have not been prophetic at all in terms of social issues such as violence that are affecting the lives of so many people, including church members. Even if the church has in some small ways spoken out,<sup>46</sup> it has not spoken loudly enough to be heard clearly and unequivocally. Yet, as we have seen, domestic violence poses a life-threatening reality in the lives of all too many women and children in our region. The few victims who do have the courage to step forward, if they are very fortunate, can at times find refuge and solace in and from the care-giving services offered by the government,<sup>47</sup> civil societies<sup>48</sup> and private sector groups. The

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<sup>46</sup> The now defunct Women's Desk of the Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) co-facilitated with the Women's Desk of the World Council of Churches a seminar on Violence Against Women in 1989. As the participants were chosen from among and limited to the spouses of the church leaders and women leaders themselves, this seminar was not known to the other 99% of Oceanian women and men. And since it was an initiative that came from women, it was never taken up seriously by the island churches. As a result, it was never followed up as an issue of great importance for the church nor was it mandated to be an important program of the PCC.

<sup>47</sup> These are the beginnings of small initiatives by governments, such as the following noted in a Fiji Times article (although it is of interest that the following initiatives was for men rather than women): "The Violence Against Women Workshop training for men begins at the Naviti Resort on Sunday...In an earlier meeting members of the taskforce on eliminating violence against women discussed strategies to involve men from all levels of society...Permanent Secretary for Justice Alipate Qetaki said the aim of the project, which includes the training of male trainers..., is the formulation of a bill on violence against women." Seinimil Lewa "Men Discuss the Problem of Women," The Fiji Times, November 15, 2002, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Civil societies in the Pacific have been very active in addressing social issues that are detrimental to the well being of Oceanian people. Many have been the prophetic voice that is

Oceanian churches, on the other hand, are yet to be heard on this issue. This is a challenge for the churches and especially for all who are educators in theological institutions. Where is our prophetic voice for and with the victims of violent abuse? What is the role of theological education in addressing this social issue?

Violence, in this case domestic violence against women, is an issue that has been ignored by the churches and has been treated as a non-issue for too long in theological schools in the Pacific. Yet it is in the theological classrooms that future church leaders and their spouses are supposedly being trained to deal with such cases in their ministries. Theological educators have a central role to play in raising the awareness of theological students on how social issues are a 'reality check' regarding the validity and applicability of theology taught in the classrooms. While theory and praxis should be integrated in theological education, many of our theological institutions are, unfortunately, long on theory and short on praxis when it comes to the application of theology to social issues such as violence against women.

### ***The Problem with clergy***

In the island Pacific context, religion is the primary life-giving stream in most communities and the most influential force of all is the Christian religion. Ordained ministers, who are considered as the earthly messengers of the Christian God, are treated with awe and veneration. They remain still, despite the many secularizing changes in society, the most influential persons in the lives of individuals, congregations and most communities. The better equipped the ordained clergy are in their theological training to work with persons affected by life crises, the more aware and informed the parishioners will become of their role in preventing or dealing with the consequences of human problems.

Yet the venerated position of male clergy in Oceania complicates the issue of violence against women even further because it is no longer a secret that many ordained male clergy, both around the world and in Oceania, are themselves perpetrators of sexual and domestic abuse against women. Most often, as in the worldwide trend, in the few cases when domestic and sexual violence by clergy is reported,<sup>49</sup> the churches either transfer the clergy perpetrators to other parishes or countries as a discipline, or the incidents are covered up by the church. Very few are made to face the consequences of their acts. This is especially the case in Oceania, where it is almost impossible to remove a minister or priest from his pedestal.

### ***The problem with 'forgiveness'***

A further problem in the Oceanian context is that female victims of violence are expected and socialised by the churches to be meek, submissive, forgiving Christians. Jesus' sufferings are often brought into play, with church teachings arguing that women should accept their suffering without complaint because it does not even come close to the suffering Jesus went through. Therefore, if Jesus could forgive those who crucified him,

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expected of the church, i.e. The Fiji Journal for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA). etc

<sup>49</sup> Recently, cases of priests in the Roman Catholic church molesting children and other abuses in the United States Australia and other countries have been the headlines in the media, even in the Pacific. Many ordained clergy in the Pacific are also guilty of having extra-marital affairs and taking sexual advantage of young women. The only difference is that it is still a deeply hidden secret in the churches.

then the women must do likewise. This unsound theology is extremely problematic when it is used to justify the endurance of continuous violence against women. The standard injunction of male clergy for victims of violence to respond with forgiveness and unconditional Christian love to their perpetrators only encourages more violence, thus avoiding dealing with the destructive consequences of violent behaviors. Churches that continue with this teaching have forgotten that Christian forgiveness must go hand in hand with justice.

### ***The problem with theological education***

One of the greatest hindrances to the call to combat violence against women lies in the inability of theological educators to situate the problem in theological education itself. Theological students are not equipped with the analytic and pastoral 'know-how' to respond adequately to crisis situations, so the age-old pattern of telling wives to be obedient, submissive and forgiving continues to be applied.

There is a general mentality among theological educators that theological issues must be separated from social issues and activism. It is stressed in many meetings of theological educators that I have attended in Oceania that social issues have no direct connection to theological education. Yet a theological educator does not need to even turn his or her head to look for connections, as the causes of many social evils are found right where he or she is.

In other words, the perpetuation of violence is deeply rooted in inadequate theological interpretations and assumptions. Theological institutions many times concentrate so single-mindedly on perfecting the intellect of the theological students and breeding outstanding academics that they overlook the missing link between the theoretical learning and the practicality of its outworking. Their students become transporters of the theoretical seeds planted in the theological classroom to the various parishes in which they will be placed. The fruitfulness of the theological nursery is tested when the planters are dispersed to work in the soil and with other gardeners. Often these theological graduates struggle to deal with the reality when they are placed in the Held, for no concrete link has been made in their theological training between faith and life.

Those who have been perpetrators of violence against their spouses and children while in theological institutions, where this was never dealt with, will continue to commit these violent acts wherever they will be. They will also preach a theology that maintains the submission and obedience of women to men as their God-given role. Those who were in institutions where domestic violence cases were never addressed will also carry with them the mentality that it is either not really a problem, or else it is a private family matter, and therefore it should be kept within the family.

### ***The Problem with biblical interpretation***

It cannot be denied that the cultural and biblical teaching that the husband is the head of the family has a great deal to do with the perpetration of domestic violence. Women are taught that they must respect men at all times — the men "out of whose bone she came. It is her sole role to bear and raise children for the continuance of the lineage and to keep the household in order. This attitude shows the influence of a literal interpretation of the second creation story in Genesis. It is such a central understanding in our churches that it is my contention that it is a contributing factor to the problem of domestic violence against women in Oceania.

The misinterpretation of the second creation story in Genesis is a prime example of how the Bible is often misused. The passage alluded to earlier, for instance, in Genesis 2:23 ("you are bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ... out of man this one is taken") is often distorted to justify violence against women. If woman is taken "out of man, then she is inferior to him and must submit to his control. Instead of upholding the created-ness of woman for the sake of partnership and companionship, the emphasis is on ownership and possession.<sup>50</sup> Such distortion upholds the standards of submissiveness set by the church, affirmed by culture and justified by biblical misinterpretations, thus leading to the ongoing sanction of domestic violence as a way of "teaching" women to remember their "proper place" in the family.

There are many other problematic biblical passages that have likewise been twisted to support a patriarchal view of women. As just one other example: "You can do to them, my virgin daughter, and his concubine, whatever you wish... Such a thing has never been seen or done" (Judges 19: 24, 30 [NIV]). This passage from Judges is in one of the least referred-to books of the Bible in sermons, Bible studies and exegetical work in most theological schools, with the exception of feminist theology. Yet it is one that clearly sanctions the abuse and torture of women at its ugliest. What an absurd text to theologize on even if one stresses that it speaks of a by-gone era. On the other hand, it is a reminder of the terror of which men are capable. It is not true that "such a thing has never been seen" or never happens. This is the horror which so many women endure: that men can do "whatever they wish." The ongoing domestic violence against women is proof of this terror.

#### ***The Problem with the climate in the church***

We have already made the case that domestic violence *has* destroyed the well-being of many women in the Pacific, most of whom are church members. One secular counselor shared with me that most of the cases she dealt with were related to domestic violence. She also shared that the majority of this clientele state that their ministers and their wives would be the last persons they would consult about this problem. This had to do not only with cultural norms but also with the teachings of the churches on their duty as women to uphold peace and maintain harmony within the family.

The climate this produces (one in which women who are victims of violence cannot turn to the church for help) demonstrates that the Oceanian churches have yet to identify their social location in this problem and their need to rethink the ways in which their patriarchal theology has contributed to the problem. It is only when the churches are able to do this that they can begin to challenge the sin of violence and to heal its victims.

Yet the churches cannot become agents of healing and wholeness until they admit the sin of their own passivity on this issue. They need an eye-opening experience of conversion and repentance that will enable them to see how some aspects of their theology and practices have actually ignited the flame of abuse against women. One of the saddest discoveries I have made is the inability of theological students to openly admit and identify domestic violence as a problem. Yet some of them have, themselves, resorted to violence as a "solution" to domestic conflicts.

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<sup>50</sup>The majority of the Oceanian men and women whom I asked about this responded that the woman was created solely to be the helper to the man, and that the Bible clearly states that the husband is the head of the family; therefore, she is to obey him and he can do as he wishes.

The churches' unquestioning usage of the traditional marriage rites has been another source of bondage for women in abusive relationships. The rites reinforce an understanding that the man is given through marriage the divine authority to rule over the woman. This divine authority must never be challenged. Therefore many women endure being abused for life because their church teaches that marriage vows made before God are sacred and must be kept "till death do us part," and that regardless of the hardship "those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder." (Matt. 19:6). The churches' rigid interpretation of this theology of marriage denies the theological affirmation that God seeks wholeness for every human life, and cannot therefore condone any relationship in which one party dominates, 'rules over', or subordinates the other party.

### **Listening to voices of the theologically trained on violence against women**

As a part of my ongoing research on the issue of violence against women, a questionnaire with nine questions was drafted<sup>51</sup> and distributed to three different groups. One group consisted of international doctoral candidates who were doing a summer course at the San Francisco Theological School in 2002. The other group included theological students at the Pacific Theological College, the only regional ecumenical theological institution in Oceania,<sup>52,53</sup> in Suva, Fiji. In order to gain a wider framework within which to work, a group of theological students from one particular ethnic group was also included.

The majority of the persons in the three groups were ordained clergy. This may be reflected in the way they responded to the questions. As a pilot core group it was hoped that ten responses would come from each group, with a balanced number of five women and five men. The purpose was to find out if and how the theology they are taught in the classroom influences the way they look at the theme of violence against women addressed in this paper, and whether their social location also determines the way they respond to the questions.

Since the questions address the core of the churches' theology, especially related to the marriage sacrament, time is definitely needed to reflect carefully on the questions. Some respondents did not have sufficient time to work on this. This explains why the expected number (30 altogether) was not reached. As a result, only 6 responded from the first group and five from the second one. This paper will discuss only the responses from these two groups and concentrate on the responses given to two questions.

The six respondents from the first group all stated, in response to one question, that there *is* a connection between the traditional view of wives being derived from and subservient to their husbands and the sanctioning of violence against women. One commented that if men must always be obeyed without question there will inevitably be questions of 'why.' Another wrote that women have often been told to stress 'obedience to...' and have been encouraged to accept their secondary, submissive, even inferior role. She continued that she had had women ask her how they can disobey their husband when they promised to

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<sup>51</sup> The questionnaire form is in the author's possession.

<sup>52</sup> PTC is owned by seventeen member churches from across the South Pacific. It is an interdenominational institution with an international faculty and an ecumenical atmosphere. At PTC we have currently enrolled students from fourteen different denominations, representing eleven Pacific Islands ethnic groups are currently enrolled at PTC.

obey them (when they took their wedding vows). It was commented that this same understanding is often reflected in sermons also.

The responses from the second group were interesting as they were not only all men but none responded 'yes' or 'no' to the above-mentioned question. Rather, they gave long explanations indicating that women *should* obey men, and why. One pointed out that women are owned by their husbands in his context, but the men were taught not to "give their hands (in violence) because the women are weak." Another stated that the traditional biblical idea that woman was created out of man is the root of all domestic violence against women.

In analysing the two groups it was apparent that both were very cautious in the way they answered the questions, making sure that their churches were not put on the spot. It was also clear that the theology that they are taught and their cultural understanding shaped the way they responded. The second group of men tended to respond more as members of their particular ethnic community, defending the communal values and the communal system. The other group reflected more the values of the individual and their own personal experiences. The women respondents were more up-front in pointing out that violence is a universal problem faced by women, and that the teaching and the theology of the church has had a lot to do with it. Some men also agreed but saw it more as a generational and cultural problem. The fact that all of these respondents were theologically trained explains the theologizing which occurred in the way they responded.

### **Clues for transformation: a way forward**

Theological schools are in an influential position to introduce structured approaches to implement changes that will shape and form the curriculum of the theological schools to include violence against women and gender issues in general, as one of their important programs. What is seriously needed in all theological schools in the Pacific is the development of a curriculum that examines the teachings and theology of their churches in relation to the issue of violence. It must be explored how the marriage liturgy in most church traditions upholds the superiority of the male partner in the vows taken for life partnership before God. A good example is the Pauline teaching in Ephesians 5: 21-33. The statement "... for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church..." has been literally interpreted as a support for suppressing women. This was cited by almost all the respondents as the text used almost always in wedding ceremonies, emphasising the roles and status of the male and female in their marriage. A section of the curriculum on violence must also look at passages such as both creation stories in Genesis, and how they have been construed so as to promote violence against and the subjugation of women.

*Weavers*, a program of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools advocating for women in theological education, has chosen to focus on domestic violence against women as its core program for the next three years. Earlier in 2003 it held a forum for the public and its member schools based in Fiji, inviting various experts to speak on "Violence against Women: and the Struggle Against it. This will be followed by a leadership training event for the clergy spouses studying with their husbands at the Pacific Theological College, on conflict management. The last event for the coming year is a seminar for the 25 SPATS member schools on the same issue. The purpose is to 'train the trainers' to start their own programs against violence in their local theological schools.

I would like to conclude by stressing that any issue to do with God's creation is an issue for theological discussion in and for the churches and their theological institutions. This is why issues such as violence against women must be at the core of theological education.

This work ends with a request to the communities and churches of Oceania, **FIRST**, to assist in identifying your social location in this problem and in rethinking the ways in which biblical interpretations and unsound theologies have contributed to the problem of violence against women. **SECOND**, we are called to remember the untold, hidden, painful stories of women who have been victims of domestic violence; and **THIRD**, we plead for a contribution to the call of worldwide Christian activists to overcome all forms of violence against women, as followers of the Christ of peace and love. Most importantly, those of us who are theological educators must create a rhythm for justice in theological education with the beat of our hearts, performed by the actions of our hands and rooted in God through the gifts of the Spirit.

## **Epilogue**

A plea from Oceanian women: "no more violence in paradise"

The following is the final statement of Oceanian women gathered at the Pacific-region World Council of Churches' Consultation, held in 1996 in Samoa, as part of the WCC Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

Strengthened and encouraged by each other and the unconditional love of God we reached out to each other and shared our painful experiences and stories of the violence against women throughout our Pacific Islands.

We heard of lack of support by governments, churches and the society as a whole for women in violent situations either at home or at work or in society.

We wept for the thousands of women who, because of cultural and religious pressures have suffered violence silently and alone.

We heard that for thousands of women and girls, home is no longer a safe place, but a place of fear, pain and terror. For example, in Papua New Guinea 67% of violence reported in the rural areas and 54% in the urban areas are in the home.

We are confronted with the knowledge that our cultures have been used as justification for violence against women.

We acknowledge that the kind of theology taught by the church not only perpetuates violence against women but often condones violence.

We listened to the stories of the betrayal of women and children's trust by the clergy through acts of sexual harassment and abuse.

We mourn the thousands of women and girls who are raped.

We discover the painful reality that we are often victims of these destructive acts of violence.

We affirm that we are survivors of the violence and committed to struggle until justice is done.

We listened, we heard, we struggled, we wept and we prayed.

**(Apia Declaration, March 12-15, 1996)**

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## READING 12

Pamela Cooper-White, "Empowering Women" In *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. pp.229-241; 248-250.

### Empowering Women

*[Jesus] unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

(Luke 4:17b-21)

It may be that she is in your parish and believes from something you said in a sermon or something you announced in the bulletin that you will be safe to tell. Or it may be that a colleague has referred this woman to you because you know something about the issue of violence against women. Or it may be simply that you are a woman. Or a sympathetic man who seems very different from her abuser(s), and who, she may hope, somehow will redeem men for her. Whatever it was that made you seem safe, now she is calling you, now she is here with you in your office. She is entrusting you with a story. It is a sacred story: one of betrayal, of shame and half-buried anger, and of terror. How will you receive her sacred story? How will you hold it in your hands, hold it out so that the two of you can look at it together in safety and in reverence?

Counseling or giving support to a person in a dangerous crisis past or present, a victim of violence, can be frightening and overwhelming. In any counseling or support session with anyone seeking help, there are things that one can do, skills to learn, and certain things to avoid. But skills alone, though powerful, will not support you, the caregiver, through fear, doubt, and struggle with the feelings it arouses in you. The importance of *self-care* has been emphasized in chapter 9. Self-care must precede and surround any of our work with victims, or we will surely sink into our own internal issues, into fatigue, and into burnout.

Perhaps the most important rubric of all is that it is not necessary to have the answers to her problems. In fact, we can't. She alone has them. When we lose sight of this, we can bear in mind the sacredness of her story. It is her story, from beginning to end. If we honor the "Thou" in her—even when she herself does not—by believing her, by reminding her of her courage, her power, her God-given right to abundant joy, and if, on a practical level, we keep her safety always as a first priority and are scrupulously clear about our boundaries, then we are not likely to make "mistakes." (We may make lapses in empathy and may fail in our insights because we are human, but this in itself can be healing rather than disruptive if we remain undefensive and committed to an honest process.) By simply offering

presence, belief, and an unshakable confidence that she deserves a life free of violence—especially when she herself does not share that confidence—we are giving a gift of healing and empowerment.

So, taking a deep breath and giving *ourselves* the gift of confidence to be with this fragile, strong, frightened, brave woman, how do we begin?

### **Immediate Crisis Response: Sexual Assault/Acute Battering Incident**

Confidence in caring for victims of violence is built on a foundation of emergency skills, which help us to be flexible and at least to a functional degree "ready for anything,"

In perhaps the most frightening scenario, a woman calls in the middle of an acute battering incident. This was what I feared and dreaded most when I worked on hotlines, and it did happen, although only twice. In neither case was I able to save the woman from being beaten. Because the batterer was already coming in the door when each woman called and she didn't have time to go to a safer place, and because neither woman gave me a name (it could have been any woman in a large metropolitan area), I could not call the police. These were terrible moments, and I have never completely gotten over wondering what I could have done differently and better in the few seconds on the phone with each of these women. The tragic answer is probably nothing. Two women clients in another agency where I worked were murdered by their batterers, and the entire agency staff went into shock and grief each time. The hotline counselors, support group facilitator, and batterer's counselor were especially devastated by these horrible incidents because they felt so responsible. But they had done everything possible within their roles to protect and empower these women. One of the murdered clients was even a model of self-determination and strength for many other women in her support group. In the face of a determined and homicidal batterer, even legal measures and police intervention have limits to the safety they can guarantee. Even as committed and trained caregivers, we fail and our failures haunt us.

Acknowledging our limits, we marshal our skills and do the best we can. The most important skill is knowing first steps in a crisis response:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Are you safe right now?* If the answer is no, then the first priority is for the woman to hang up the phone and get to a safe place. She may need you to suggest some options; Go to a neighbor's or to a lighted place where there are people—a laundromat, twenty-four-hour convenience store, grocery, or pharmacy. If she is alone in a phone booth at night, also suggest that she go to one of these more populated and well-lighted places. Try to get her full name and present location. Encourage her or offer to call the police *immediately*. *Do not stay on the phone with her any longer than necessary to confirm that she is leaving and will call you as soon as she gets there and has called the police.*

2. If she believes she is safe now, explore this: Where is the person who hurt you? Is he coming back? Are you safe where you are? Is anyone there with you? If you do not believe she is safe, again, encourage her to go to a safer place.

3. Get her phone number in case you are disconnected. If her number is not local, call her back so that a long-distance call on the phone will not arouse the batterer's suspicion. Ask if and when it's safe to call her back and whether she would like you to call again to check in with her, and if so, when.

4. Ask about her medical situation: *Are you hurt? Do you need medical attention?* If she was just raped or beaten, encourage her or offer to call the police or 911. Take into account that she may be in shock and minimizing her injury. The police can assess this and get her an ambulance if necessary. Also,

she may want the evidence later, although in the immediate aftermath of the crisis she is not likely to be thinking of legal steps.

These are the first, preliminary steps before the main body of the crisis counseling session can responsibly take place.

### **Crisis Response: Suicide**

Perhaps the other most frightening scenario, equally a crisis, is a suicide call. Battered women, rape and incest victims, and other survivors of trauma do sometimes attempt or wish to attempt suicide. The main thing to know is that *it is not necessary to be an expert or a clinician successfully and quickly to make a preliminary suicide assessment and get the person appropriate help*. She called you. This means some part of her trusted you and reached out to you for help, even if there is a part of her that is trying or threatening to end her life. You can trust that there is a connection there and depend on that as well as your skills to keep *yourself from* panicking. In a suicide crisis, the following steps should be taken.<sup>2</sup>

1. If the person says that she has already taken steps to end her life, try immediately to find out the person's location and call police or paramedics. (Do not depend on having the phone call traced—it can take too long if the person has already made the suicide attempt.)

2. If the person has not actually harmed herself (which is most often the case) but she tells you or you suspect that she is suicidal, for *any* reason including your own intuition or just a sense that the person seems very depressed, reflect what you think you are hearing, and *ask*: "You sound really down/at the end of your rope/hopeless . . . are you thinking about killing yourself?" Asking the question will not "give the person ideas" or push the person further in the direction of suicide. On the contrary, naming the thoughts may be enough to relieve some of the pressure and help the person not to act on them.

Do not ignore even vague clues and suggestions. Clues are present in approximately 80 percent of suicidal deaths.<sup>3</sup> It is a myth that people who talk about suicide don't commit it. Clues may include such indirect comments as "I can't stand it any more," "Everyone would be better off without me," "This is the last time I'll have to deal with this," or even queries about wills and funerals.<sup>4</sup>

3. Also be aware that depression is not the only mood or state in which suicide can occur.<sup>5</sup> If the person seems disoriented (as seen in connection with alcohol, drugs, or psychosis), in a state of defiant frustration (determined to seize control of one's fate, even if the only control left seems to be to kill oneself, the ultimate "I quit!"), or what one expert calls "dependent-dissatisfied" (feeling helpless and trapped by a state of dependency from which there appears to be no exit), or if your own sense continues to be strong in spite of denials, explore the level of risk. This is done in some very specific, concrete ways:

a. Have you thought about how you would do it? Do you have a plan? (If not, probe a little further: Have you ever fantasized about it? What did you do in your fantasy?) Other indications of a plan might be giving away valued possessions, saying goodbye to loved ones, writing a suicide note, sending the children to stay with a relative for the weekend, making out a will, or otherwise showing signs of wrapping up her affairs.

b. If any sort of plan or fantasy emerges, ask if she has the means to carry out the plan; for example, if she is thinking about taking pills, does she have them in her house?

c. Ask her directly how likely she thinks it is that she might actually do it. Most people are very honest about this and will ponder the question seriously with you.

d. Find out about her history: "Have you ever tried to hurt yourself or to commit suicide before?" If she has ever attempted suicide before, the risk is much higher. Eight or nine out of ten repeated attempters ultimately do kill themselves, so this is a very serious sign.<sup>6</sup> Family history is also a risk factor—you might ask if anyone else in her family ever attempted suicide.<sup>7</sup>

e. The risk is also much higher if, at the time of your intervention, she is intoxicated with drugs or alcohol, and/or if she is alone and the means are immediately available.

f. Drug and alcohol abuse, psychosis, severe depression, recent loss, recent physical trauma, a history of unsuccessful medical treatment, and the anniversary of a trauma are all risk factors as well. Consider what you already know about the person, and explore these areas to the extent that it seems possible without "grilling" her or interrogating her. And remember: A history of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse is in and of itself a risk factor.<sup>8</sup>

4. Try to reduce fertility:

a. Explore what other support systems she has—supportive *family* members she can talk to? A therapist? a friend? Try to help her reduce her isolation without taking this on as a twenty-four-hour burden for yourself alone.

b. If she has the means immediately available, try to reduce the lethality of the situation by asking her to get rid of them—for example, flush the pills down the toilet, unload the gun and throw away the ammunition, throw away the razor in a place she can't retrieve it or give it to someone.

5. Do not confuse expression of emotion with lethality. Validate and do not try to contradict or argue her out of her feelings of pain, anger, or despair. Let her know that her feelings are important and understandable. If she is crying, let her take time to let it out. If she is screaming, yelling, or raging directly at you, try to help her regain self-control by making supportive, de-escalating statements such as: "OK, try to slow down now, I want to be able to help you, but it's hard for me to understand you.... Take a deep breath and count to ten with me. ... I know you're angry and you have a right to be, but I want to hear you, and it's hard when you're directing it at me.... Take it easy now, and let me try to help you."

6. Offer realistic hope, support, and positive reframing. Without negating any other pain, try to notice positive aspects in the situation and bring them to her attention—her courage in sharing her pain with you and in reaching out, good things in her life that she herself has mentioned (don't try to fabricate these or jolly her up), even her ability to feel so deeply as a sign of her sensitivity and worth.

7. Make a contract. This is the basic, standard way of working with someone who is suicidal. A contract should include two elements—an agreement not to kill herself before speaking with you or another professional and a time frame. The time frame for checking in is typically twenty-four hours, but if she is feeling very suicidal, it may be necessary for her to check in hourly or sooner. If the risk is not too great, the time frame may be longer.

She should say the agreement back to you herself. Be aware of evasiveness and press for a real commitment. If possible, try to get it in writing: "I will not kill myself without talking to you or my therapist first. I agree to call you back to check in within twenty-four hours."

Try also to build into the contract an agreement that if she is feeling suicidal, she will go to a safe place.

8. Follow up. A contract is a *temporary* measure and needs follow-up. Be aware that *most suicides actually occur within about three months following the beginning of "improvement,"* when the individual has the energy to carry out the suicide plan.<sup>9</sup>

As a pastor, the follow-up task is *not* to do the ongoing counseling needed, which is beyond the scope of general pastoral care, but to help her to make a good connection with a licensed therapist whose job it is to be available for emergencies on a twenty-four-hour basis, and who has the necessary training to treat suicidal conditions. You may make an agreement to follow up on therapist referrals a part of a follow-up contract with the suicidal person. At the same time, be alert to clues thrown in your direction during the follow-up phase. Missed appointments, odd telephone messages, anything that seems "off" should be followed up promptly.

The pastor's role in follow-up, while not a substitute for psychotherapy, legitimately involves exploring the meaning of the wish to kill herself, her motives and problems, and helping her to deal with the underlying problems and generating alternatives. Exploring options, past coping mechanisms, and continuing to build a wider support system—both within and beyond the church community—are all appropriately the province of pastoral care.

In more depth, the pastor has a *primary* follow-up role in exploring the spiritual meaning of the suicidal feelings and the theological dimensions of despair, rage, fear, and pain.

Exploring questions of meaning and God's purposes for the person as well as ethical questions and the person's moral values about suicide and life and death are all important areas for pastoral conversation.

9. If after several attempts you are *not* able to get a contract, and you believe the risk is imminent, you will need to *call the police or paramedics* and ask them to take the person into protective custody. In most states, in cases of suicide, this means psychiatric observation in a hospital. This is obviously a last resort and does run the risk of rupturing trust and rapport. It is a frightening thing to do and feels terribly coercive. However, in the long run, your concern for her safety as your first priority is a sign of your fidelity, and it is possible, over time, to rebuild the safety in your relationship on this foundation. No one is 100 percent suicidal.<sup>10</sup> Crisis expert Burl Gilliland writes:

"People with the strongest death wishes are invariably ambivalent, confused and gasping for life. Their emotions and their perspectives are paralyzed. Their patterns are illogical and their sense of available options is frozen in an all-or-nothing, black-or-white mode. They may be able to see only two alternatives—misery and death. They are typically unable to project themselves ahead to happier, more successful times." Even though strong action may seem to be against her will, to ignore or minimize the suicidal person's communication of her intentions<sup>12</sup> may, paradoxically, reinforce her sense of despair and isolation. It is important to remember, if you come to this difficult juncture, that there was a part of her that wanted to live, or she would not? have reached out to you.

In addition to the above steps, a few "don'ts" have been identified by experts on suicide:<sup>13</sup>

1. Don't lecture, blame, or preach to the suicidal person.
2. Don't criticize the person or her choices or behaviors.
3. Don't debate the pros and cons.
4. Don't be misled by the person's telling you the crisis is

5. Don't deny her suicidal ideas.
6. Don't try to challenge for shock effects.
7. Don't leave her isolated, unobserved, and disconnected.
8. Don't diagnose and analyze behavior or confront her with interpretations, especially during the acute phase.
9. Don't be passive.
10. Don't overreact. Keep calm,
11. Don't keep her suicidal risk a secret (be trapped in the confidentiality issue). Her safety comes first.
12. Don't get sidetracked on extraneous or external issues or persons.
13. Don't glamorize, martyrize, glorify, or deify suicidal behavior in others, past or present.
14. Don't forget to follow up.

Suicide presents an important challenge to the pastoral perspective, because at its very core, suicide is a profound matter of hope and despair, a matter of transcendent meaning. It is the loss of hope that distinguishes suicidality from nonsuicidal anxiety and depression.<sup>14</sup> This is a theological matter! In anxiety and depression, one faces a traumatic state in the future (anxiety) or tries to deal with it in the present/past (depression). In a suicidal state, not only has the present become unmanageable and unbearable, the future has become unimaginable. It is the pastor's role to be a bearer of hope to the hopeless person until she can once again catch some glimpse of future possibility. The affirmation of God's abiding love and care can do much to lighten her sense of despair. Faith that she is going to make it can be contagious.<sup>15</sup>

This is emphatically *not* to say that the pastor should be in the business of trying to jolly up the suicidal person. To do so would be to give the message that her pain is trivial and that the valley of despair into which she has entered is too fearful for the pastor to journey with her. She is once again discounted and left alone, a reinforcement of her suicidal condition. To the extent that we can tolerate it ourselves, it is our priestly work to travel to the depths of despair with her—carrying the beacon of faithful hope and the promise of God's love as a lamp on the path at a time when perhaps her own light is too fragile to light the way on its own. Part of this is allowing for the free expression of painful emotions, and part is exploring the meaning of her longing for death—which may be very hard for us to hold.

Paul writes: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:22-25). Jungian analyst James Hillman comments on this passage that a concrete hope, a hope for something one knows, is no real hope.<sup>16</sup> We cannot inspire someone with concrete promises or even imaginary pictures of a better future. Hope by definition is ineffable. What we can do is hold on to our own capacity for hope as we descend with the suicidal person, carrying it for her, as it were, while she comes to understanding the unique meaning and perspective of what has brought her to this impasse in her life.

### **Crisis Counseling beyond the Acute Emergency**

Once you have ascertained the safety of the person at risk, and once there is no issue of suicidality, then it is possible to proceed with second-stage crisis intervention. This may be very soon in the aftermath of an acute crisis event, or it may be much longer, even years, after the actual trauma.

Crisis aftermath begins in the moment in which the woman realizes that there was a crisis and seeks help for the first time.

"Crisis" may be defined as "a perception of an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds the resources and coping mechanisms of the person."<sup>17</sup> Ordinary coping mechanisms and habitual choices no longer work. The person feels immobilized and out of control. Constriction occurs, in which the range of options that would occur to the person under other circumstances seems narrowed to a few terrible choices or none.

Crisis counseling is somewhat different from pastoral counseling in several respects. It is likely to be more structured for the sake of helping to restore clarity to one in crisis. It focuses on the immediate events or the trauma that precipitated her seeking help and usually ranges much less over questions of the person's history, upbringing, philosophy, theology, or the meaning of events. A crisis session has several essential components. There are a number of models for this, and all contain similar components.<sup>18</sup>

I use a model with five basic steps.<sup>19</sup> In this model, a cue for moving to the next step is when she starts to repeat.

1. *Instill calm; be reassuring.* This step is necessary when the person "breaks down" with crying, sobbing, screaming, or other dramatic emotional responses. No matter what you may be feeling inside, it is of utmost importance to convey the message that you can hear and hold whatever she has to tell, and that you will not go into crisis too. Some specific techniques for helping her to move out of her own panic include: "Take a deep breath." "That's good . . . that's right." "It's OK now." "It's OK to cry; let it out." "I can hear you're upset, and I can really understand that." It is healing and validating for her to let out her feeling in the safety of that emotional "container" you provide by your presence (either in person or on the phone). This is very different from crying and shaking all alone.

Usually this intensity lessens naturally after a few minutes, but if you feel, that she cannot wind down without assistance to a point where she can begin to talk, you can use some interventions to help her calm herself. For example, "OK, I hear you. Now for me to help you, I need for you to talk to me what's happened?" "Take a deep breath and try to talk to me. Can you tell me what's happened?" "Take a deep breath and try to count to ten with me ..."

2. *Get the story clear. What happened?* What happened that made you decide to call now—if not the first time, as with battering? What's different about this time that made you decide to call?

In this *crisis* intervention session, as distinct from a regular pastoral counseling session, try to focus on the immediate event and less on previous events or longer history of assault or abuse. That part of her story can come later when she is not in acute crisis.

Help her to focus by using active listening skills, that is, feeding back to her what she has told you as accurately as possible without interpretation, judgment, or advice. For example: "I hear you saying. . . ." "Let me see if I'm understanding it right: this is what happened. . . ." "So you're thinking/feeling . . . ?" Summarizing and paraphrasing what she has told is a useful way not only for the counselor to get clear on the story, but for the woman in crisis to hear more clearly what she herself has just said and to make more sense of her experience in her own mind. This also gives her the message that you take what she is presenting very seriously, that you believe her, and you do not feel a need to change, question, or embroider on what she has told.

Direct questioning is probably less useful in any case than simply reflecting back and letting the story unfold in the sequence she wants to present. At times, however, you may want to ask a question for

clarification. In general, it is better to use open-ended questions (one that is not answered simply by a yes or a no). For example: "What happened then?" "What injuries do you have?" "What made you decide to call now?"

One little warning about questions I have found particularly useful: "Why" questions are often heard by a counselee as judgmental or challenging, even when that is not the intent, and should be avoided. Of course, a question like "Why did you provoke him like that?" is blatantly inappropriate, but more subtle questions like "Why do you think so?" "Why do you feel. . . ?" "Why do you think he did ... ?" are also undermining rather than clarifying. The "Why" question at best is a powerful and potentially defense-arousing tool, used mainly in cognitive-style confrontation or depth-therapeutic interpretation, and does not normally have any place in crisis counseling.

3. *Validate her feelings.* The pitfall here is cutting this step off too soon because it can be so hard and painful to listen to. The temptation is to cut to step 4, problem-solving. But that is something she may be more likely to be able to do for herself without you if her feelings are finally heard, validated, and not discounted. You may be the first person she has ever told, and your validation is essential in her having the courage to continue breaking silence and seeking help. Some examples: "I can understand your feeling that way/angry/sad/ confused. . . ." "That sounds really hard for you." "That's certainly tough." "It's OK to have mixed feelings." "No, you don't deserve that, and I would be angry too."

4. *Problem-solving.* Make every attempt to have a good summary from step 2 and a fairly thorough exploration of step 3 before entering this step. A good way to begin with problem-solving is to *explore her own past coping mechanisms*. Remember that crisis may have temporarily made it hard for her to think and plan clearly. This does not mean that she is without the resources to do this. Draw on past successes, however small. "What have you done before?" "What's worked, not worked?" *Explore her options; do not give advice:* savings, staying with friends or relatives where he wouldn't think of looking for her, can she take time off from work? and so on. This is the step in which you will *make relevant referrals*. Having an up-to-date and heavily annotated rolodex is critical. A very helpful focusing question in this step is: "What do you think you want to do now?" In concluding this step, try to *get an action plan*, even if it is simply to think it over and call back again in a week. Summarize the action plan back to her, including any referrals made.<sup>20</sup>

5. *Closing.* There are several elements to a good closing.

a. Express *appreciation and respect* directly: "I'm really glad you called."

b. *Validate her courage:* "It takes a lot of courage to take this step."

c. Assure *confidentiality* (and explain exceptions, if any).

d. Check and be sure that you have *not missed anything* important; let her know that you care about trying to meet *her expectations from you:* "Was there anything you were wanting from this call/meeting that you still need?" (Go back through the steps if necessary.)

e. Let her know clearly *when she can reach you again and of any limits on your availability or limits on what you can provide (making a referral for further help if you have not already done so).*

f. Repeat her action plan and tell her you care.

This is the scaffolding upon which a good crisis session can be built, and there are numerous similar variations. As many years as I have used this model, I still keep it in outline form on an index card, and I use it—especially if I am tired, sick, preoccupied with other matters, or taken by surprise (I think she is calling about the parish picnic and suddenly we are in the middle of a crisis call). When I was doing twenty-four-hour hotline on-call for a shelter, and a call would come over the beeper in the wee hours of the morning, I would pause a moment to make sure I was fully awake, and I would quickly scan the card to orient myself. I have found that it is always helpful, no matter how "experienced" or "trained" I think I am.



Crisis also elicits deeper-than-usual responses in us as we try to offer support and help. Our own buttons are pushed. Our own experiences of grief, terror, rage, betrayal, or entrapment are brought close to the surface. Especially those experiences and feelings which we have not fully processed ourselves will be activated in ways that may not be fully conscious and that may indeed, trip us up, if not in the actual counseling, then in other parts of our lives. One pastor I know was brought up never to be afraid, because fear wasn't manly. When he counsels, it is hard for him simply to dwell in someone's fear without trying to soothe it or fix it. Another pastor admits that she becomes seriously depressed when angry herself and hides her anger from the world and from her own knowing. It is difficult for her to explore the anger being presented by those who come to her for help, even though she knows in theory that they need to "get in touch with" their anger. In my own pastoring, I sometimes feel impatient, because I may believe the abused person "should" feel more angry, or "should" feel more urgency about getting out of the dangerous situation. I find it difficult at times to "sit on" my own reactions to her situation and be present with her in her own feelings and the timing of her own process.

Nor will the person necessarily behave like a "good" victim—pleasant, cooperative, undemanding, reasonable, grateful for our attentions. Survivors will sometimes emotionally attack a caregiver, unconsciously doing to the pastor what was done to them. A friend who worked with deaf children first described this phenomenon to me: she was often attacked by children whom she taught for the first time to use sign language and communicate. She was puzzled and hurt because she felt that she was the most loving person in their young lives. It then occurred to her that, by being present to their pain and teaching them the language to name it, she also was the one who was near enough to receive the accumulated years of pent-up rage and anguish as soon as they could communicate. She stopped taking it personally and found that, if she could honor their feelings without taking on the blame for what had happened to them, a deep trust evolved over time. There are many parallels in working with survivors of abuse and trauma.

Because of the enormity of their pain, survivors will also sometimes pressure the pastor for more time than is conceivable, more energy than is available. Their own fractured boundaries and intense need may make it difficult for them to recognize that others can be truly committed to helping them and at the same time need to set limits on what can be given. Rage and despair can set in when limits are set, and yet without limits both partners in the pastoral relationship will spiral down into exhaustion and frustration. Pastors will experience some survivors in a state of deep dependency, regressing to the developmental stage of the earliest wound. We will be tempted to try to meet the expectation (hers colliding with ours) that we will be able to provide a spiritual-magical cure. What is needed is to maintain good boundaries and recognize our own human limitations, while staying firmly committed to the survivor and to the truth.

Pastors should also be alert to the phenomenon of survivors (unconsciously) seeking inappropriate "help" to avoid real help because facing the return of memories and the challenge of true change is terrifying. This can be a trap for all of us who want to help. The survivor is seeking us out, begging us for more of our time and wisdom, telling us that we are what she needs. Our own rescue fantasies are inflated by the praise and apparent need for what we have to give. But at all times we must ask ourselves whether a referral would actually be in her better interests. Sometimes seeking help from us is avoiding the help she really needs.

To walk with a survivor on her path of pain and recovery is a profound experience, but the pastor should be prepared to feel pain, horror, anger, and fear, as well as personal hurt and exhaustion along the way. Ruth Schmidt, a rape survivor, has written:

*I am an uncomfortable person. . . Touch my anger. It is damp from tears. It is hot from smoldering. It is heavy and difficult to carry. Taste my anger, it is bitter. Smell my anger, it is rancid, it is filled with sweat from a heaving man forcing himself upon me and into me. Understand*

*my anger, for you have brought it upon me. "Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right; theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I do not know this heaven.<sup>21</sup>*

It is painful to be present to such pain and rage. But the capacity to hear and be big enough to contain it, without breaking down ourselves, without shrinking from the survivor or writing her off as demented or too angry, is the very gift that will help her to heal herself. As we can tolerate her depths, of pain, so, too, she can accept them and begin to recover her life. Again, this cannot be done without healing our own wounds and being able to tell the difference between what is our own pain and what is hers.

## **Empowerment-Based Pastoral Counseling**

Counseling with a view toward empowering the person counseled and respecting her process is the foundation of all good counseling—peer, pastoral, or psychotherapeutic. It is particularly crucial in counseling a victim of violent trauma. The experience that she brings for healing is a wound to her power. What she needs more than anything is the restoration of a sense that she can be powerful and fully alive once again. Beyond all specific skills and techniques, and beyond all the resources about which a counselor may be knowledgeable, the most healing thing of all will be the counselor's absolute conviction that she is the one in charge of her recovery from trauma, and that she has the inner strength and courage to overcome what happened to her. She has demonstrated that strength and courage in concrete ways: by coming to you, by telling her story, by surviving in whatever way she could. She is already whole. She needs to reclaim that wholeness.

It is the relationship that heals.<sup>22</sup> The basis of an empowering counseling relationship includes three components: (1) *empathy*—reflecting accurately and fully the counselee's feelings as she has expressed them, without adding, interpreting, or judging; (2) *respect*—communicating acceptance of the counselee as a person, what Carl Rogers described as "unconditional positive regard;" and (3) *warmth*—showing attentiveness and caring through nonverbal behaviors. Warmth does *not*, however, require any physical touching, while respect *precludes* it under most circumstances. More will be said about this below.

Facilitative responding includes the most attentive listening, active listening that is not rote repetition but mirroring back to the fullness of the material being received. Nonverbal signs of attentiveness such as eye contact and a relaxed but alert and interested body position are important. Such behaviors as eating one's lunch, picking up the phone, or leaning back too comfortably in one's chair may be acceptable during a casual conversation but destroy trust and rapport with a victim of violent trauma. They send a nonverbal message that her story is not very serious or important.

The power of simply mirroring responses should not be underestimated. Very little guidance or direction is necessary. George Gazda has described this as "facilitative responding:"<sup>23</sup>

*Facilitative responses serve as a mirror of the helpee's psychic self, assisting the helpee to get a complete and accurate picture of his/her self. When helpees see their views more clearly, they may become able to test the validity of their perception, their memory, their judgment. They may discover contradictions within their statements or omissions in what they have said or believe. They may decide that some of their assumptions are unrealistic. This experience of self-exploration leads to better and more complete understanding of the situation and of self, both of which are necessary prerequisites to problem-solving and growth.*

At its deepest, pastoral counseling, like peer counseling, may need to explore discrepancies, inconsistencies, or irrational patterns of thinking that the counselee has presented and that are not helpful to her. This is the area of gentle confrontation. It is extremely important that the threatening nature of such confrontation be understood, and that no questioning or pointing out of inconsistencies be undertaken without a firmly established base of empathy, respect, warmth, and unconditional positive

regard. Even then, such interventions must not be to impose the point of view of the counselor, but to propose alternatives that might be helpful to the counselee and are aimed toward her good and not the counselor's own needs. The counselee must feel free to refuse any such line of exploration and reject any observation that feels intrusive. If she is angry, this must be met with nondefensiveness and non-judgment.

## **pp.248-250**

### **Essential Messages of Hope**

Finally, there are a few things that should be said clearly and directly to any victim of violent trauma, particularly upon first hearing her story, but also from time to time thereafter:

1. I believe you.<sup>39</sup>
2. This should never have happened to you. It is not God's will for you. (If the abuse occurred in the church, in your official capacity as clergy you may also add: "I'm sorry on behalf of the church I represent and love that this was allowed to happen to you.")
3. This is not your fault.
4. You do have choices now. You have a right to determine what happens to you and what you want to do now.
5. (For the sake of process and trust:) This is what I can provide you now (be very clear), and here are some other resources who can provide x, y, z ....
6. God cares about what happens to you and is with you. God's love is real.

### **The Role of a Spiritual Community in Healing**

If the pastor meets with a survivor one-on-one, there is still a dimension of healing that is lacking. As important as the confidential pastoral relationship can be, it can in and of itself continue to model isolation and secrecy if the resources and love of the worshipping community are not offered. Not all survivors will want, to share their stories with others, and no one should ever be coerced into doing so. However, a congregation that is educated and sensitized is a powerful witness to the larger themes that affect the survivor's life. Just having such a context, even if not one word of her individual story is ever told, can be tremendously healing.

It is not only the pastor's role, but the congregation's—in actions as well as words—to assure the victim-survivor of God's love and to provide her with an opportunity to build a spiritual support community for herself. Much of this work is in simply witnessing to the larger truths of violence against women and the objectification of oppressed groups. It is the work of making the parish a safe place where confidences are kept but destructive secrets are eradicated.

As the church, we are called to join in this movement to break silence and to restore justice. In the lectionary for the Baptism of Christ, we hear one of the great servant songs from the prophet Isaiah: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ... A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice" (Isa. 42:1ff.). This is a call, an anointing of each and every one of us.

First, we are called to see and hear the truth. There are a lot of reasons why we don't want to. But perhaps the most compelling is that, in addition to the forces of social inertia and unconscious collusion, if we were to acknowledge the truth of all this violence, its prevalence, and the pervasiveness of oppres-

sion of women, it would be too terrible. Who could bear it? If rape and battering were *not* as rare as the prevailing myths would have us believe, if they were *not* just the work of a small percentage of sociopathic criminals, then all women, and indeed, a great many men, are vulnerable. There is no "profile" that makes one woman more vulnerable to violence than another. We all are vulnerable. It is the (mostly subliminal) reality with which we live on a daily basis. But we will never change it until we allow ourselves to see it in all its tremendous proportions.

In very concrete ways, this means putting posters and flyers and tracts in the narthex of our churches, and preaching and teaching about violence against women until our congregations begin to trust and to know that this is a safe place to talk about what really happens in their lives. It means asking the right questions when we see bruises or frightened behavior. It means being alert to the statistical reality that, if one out of five women are adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, one out of three women are raped, and as many as *one-half of* all women are battered, then proportionately as many women in our congregations are also victims—and they are waiting for a word of hope and healing from *us*.

Second, we must name the violence *as* violence. When we hear stories of individual women, we must remind ourselves to shift the focus *off all* the ways in which we are socialized to question her, doubt her, wonder what she did wrong or what in her psychological makeup made her vulnerable. We must hold focus on the one who is responsible – the one who chose to cross the line, to violate her personhood, to harass, to terrorize, to stalk, to rape, to batter.

When we do this, we will start to get angry. Perhaps especially as Christians, this feels wrong to us. We are socialized—and women doubly so—to avoid anger, to smooth things over, to "forgive and forget," to "turn the other cheek." We push our anger underground, where it festers as depression, numbness, and distortion of the facts. We need to let our anger out again to breathe, and so to animate us—which literally means to "en-soul" us once again—to concern, solidarity, and action.

This is our third calling: We must mobilize our anger beyond helplessness and beyond sympathy to Justice for victims/survivors. This means growing up and taking responsibility as a community to say to perpetrators that violence is unacceptable, that we will not resort to quick fixes and cheap, premature forgiveness without true repentance and change of life, and that we will stand for the righting of these wrongs—in our policies and in our relationships.

Finally, we are called to restore right relation, not Just between individual men and women, and not in the sense of premature or cheap forgiveness, but in the sense of the whole community, the whole church, the whole society. This is the work of reconciliation to which we are called. (More will be said about this in the final chapter.) In concrete terms, this means that we can use language that does not exclude women and other oppressed groups or perpetuate stereotypes. We can ask ourselves as we prepare sermons, prayers, and religious education materials: How would this particular statement sound to the ears of someone who has been abused? For example, if we preach about sin, are we careful to do so in ways that will not seem to blame victims of violence for their victimization? If we preach about themes of sacrifice, endurance, or forgiveness, are we unwittingly exhorting abuse victims to denigrate their own feelings or even to stay in or return to violent situations?

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# God Of The Pacific

Lyrics by Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko

Music by Igelese Ete

Commissioned for the Violence Against Women Conference, Suva - Fiji 2006

$\text{♩} = 70$  With a heart of worship

Verse 1

Chords:  $E^b$   $F_{\text{min}}/E^b$   $E^b/G$   $F_{\text{min}}/A^b$   $E^b$   $E^b/F$   $B^b$   $A^b$   $E^b/G$

Voice

GOD of the Pa - ci - fic, guide your peo - ple, GOD of all

Chords:  $A^b$   $E^b/G$   $F_{\text{min}}7$   $D^b$   $B^b$

na - tions guide your crea - tion, We've come to

Chords:  $A^b$   $E^b/G$   $A^b$   $E/G$   $F_{\text{min}}7$   $B^b$   $C_{\text{sus}}^4$   $C$

praise you and wor - ship you we mag - ni - fy your name.

(CHORUS 1)

Chords:  $A^b$   $E^b/G$   $F_{\text{min}}$   $E^b$   $D^b$   $F_{\text{min}}/C$   $B^b$

Let our doubts turn in - to faith and our fears in - to hope. We've come to

Chords:  $A^b$   $E^b/G$   $A^b$   $E/G$   $F_{\text{min}}$   $B^b$   $A^b$   $E^b$   $B^b$

praise you and wor - ship you we mag - ni - fy your name.

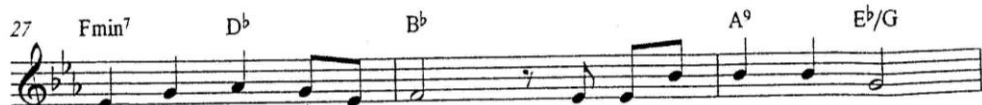
Verse 2

Chords:  $E^b$   $F_{\text{min}}7$   $E^b/G$   $F_{\text{min}}/A^b$   $E^b$   $E^b/F$   $B^b$   $A^b$   $E^b/G$   $A^9$   $E^b/G$

GOD of the Pa - ci - fic, guide your peo - ple, GOD of all na - tions




27 Fmin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup> A<sup>9</sup> E<sup>b</sup>/G



guide your crea - tion, and may love and peace

(Go to CHORUS 1)


30 A<sup>9</sup> E/G A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup> Csus<sup>4</sup> C



rule our hearts and teach us to walk to your will


## Verse 3

33 E<sup>b</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>/G Fmin/A<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup> Fm B<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>9 E<sup>b</sup>/G A<sup>9</sup> E<sup>b</sup>/G



Peo-ple di-vi-ded and de-vas-ta-ted peo-ple bro - ken torn by vio-lence

39 Fmin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup> A<sup>9</sup> E<sup>b</sup>/G



see - king your dis - cern - ment We've come to praise you and

(Go to CHORUS 1)

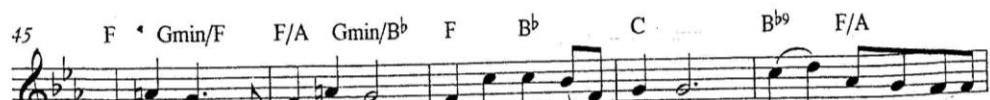
42 A<sup>9</sup> E/G Fm B<sup>b</sup> Csus<sup>4</sup> C



wor - ship you we mag - ni - fy your name.

## Verse 4 (Key Change)

45 F Gmin/F F/A Gmin/B<sup>b</sup> F B<sup>b</sup> C B<sup>b</sup>9 F/A



Trans-form us all trans - form your mis-sion To know you and to

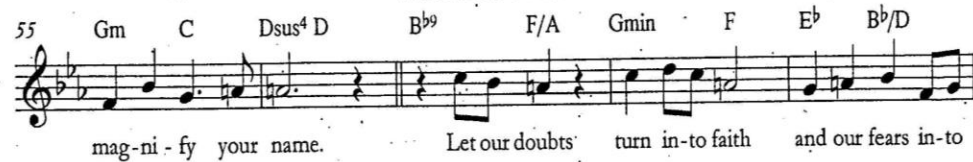
50 B<sup>9</sup> F/A Gmin<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> C B<sup>9</sup> F/A B<sup>9</sup> F/A



walk with you we are one in your love We've come praise you and wor-ship you we

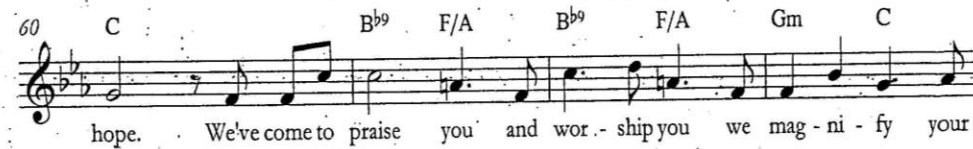
## FINAL CHORUS

55 Gm C Dsus<sup>4</sup> D B<sup>9</sup> F/A Gmin F E<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>/D



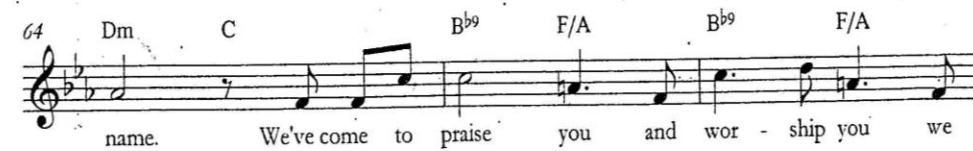
mag-ni - fy your name. Let our doubts turn in-to faith and our fears in-to

60 C B<sup>9</sup> F/A B<sup>9</sup> F/A Gm C



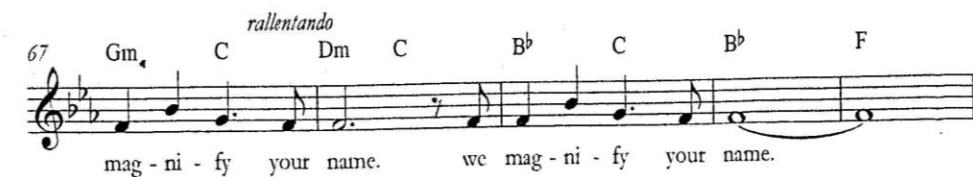
hope. We've come to praise you and wor - ship you we mag - ni - fy your

64 Dm C B<sup>9</sup> F/A B<sup>9</sup> F/A



name. We've come to praise you and wor - ship you we

67 Gm C *rallentando* Dm C B<sup>b</sup> C B<sup>b</sup> F



mag - ni - fy your name. we mag - ni - fy your name.

