

World Council of Churches
Education and Ecumenical Formation

July 2004

TAMAR CAMPAIGN



STOP VIOLENCE

Institute for the Study of the Bible - Worker Ministry Project



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

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LETTER FROM THE STAFF

Dear friend and colleague,

It may be that over the years you have found it extremely challenging to preach or teach on violence related issues, especially on rape, incest, violence and people living with disabilities, physical and/or psychological violence at place of work in the church and in multi-faith contexts then this is the issue of *Ministerial Formation* to read and keep close to your desk.

In these pages, we hear voices and actions taken to address violence and peace-making in a variety of contexts in the church and society. We hear stories of courage, commitment and determination to make a difference in people's lives. The issue is also rich with bibliography and endnotes that will hopefully lead you to other important resources. We are very grateful to the six women and men who have accepted to write on such a challenging issue in the mission and ministry of ecumenical theological education. Special thank you to Prof. Gerald West for giving permission to use the Tamar Campaign poster for the cover. More on the Campaign on page 4-12 of this issue.

However, it is important to note that for the first time during my time in this office, we received more articles than we could fit in one issue of *Ministerial Formation*. We therefore ask those who sent their articles but will not find them in this issue to be patient with us. We assure you that they will appear in the next issue of January 2005. For now, thank you too for your contribution.

With this issue we would like you to note that the World Council of Churches has called for a worldwide campaign "**On the Wings of a Dove**" focusing on "Overcoming Violence against Women and Children", 25 November -10 December 2004. This Campaign falls within the "2001-2010 Decade to Overcome Violence : Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace" launched in January 2001. For more information you can get in touch with ETE office, the WCC-Women's Desk ag@wcc-coe.org, and the WCC website <http://wcc-coe.org/dov>.

Finally, on behalf of ETE staff and consultants, I would like to thank my colleague Wati Longchar, consultant for WCC-ETE Asia & Pacific region (office based in Jorhat, Assam, India) for helping in soliciting for these articles.

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**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 a 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 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 pre-meditates 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 of her (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 of her 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', 'Ammons', '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 (Patte 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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A SEMINAR CURRICULUM ON DISABILITY AND VIOLENCE FOR LOCAL CHURCHES AND THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS¹

Amanda Shao Tan

Introduction

Although the study of disability issues in the west began in the 70s, comprehensive research about abuse against people with disabilities (PWDs) started only recently.² Most literature on violence in relation to disability was written in the mid-1990s.³ In Asia, there is inadequate research data on PWDs,⁴ much more so, literature on disability in the Asian context. This small amount of research and literature reflects how much more needs to be done for and with PWDs, especially in protecting them against violence or the abuse of power.

The Church is the redemptive medium through which Christ's wisdom over and against all kinds of powers is manifested (Ephesians. 3:10-11; also see 1:19b-23). Hence, it is but natural to expect the Church, the body of Christ, to take the lead in teaching and empowering its members to reflect Christ's redeeming attitude and action against destructive use of power. This article, therefore, is aimed primarily at suggesting a seminar curriculum on empowering believers—with or without disabilities—against violence perpetrated against PWDs. The article includes information about violence in relation to disability and recommended resources, most of which will be accessible online.

Disability and violence

Disability defined

Disability⁵ is a loss or impairment that restricts one's functioning ability within the range of what is considered normal.⁶ It can be physical/biological, intellectual/developmental (sometimes termed as

¹ I am grateful to Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada for granting me the position of Academic Scholar-in-Residence from September 2002 to February 2003. This position provided me with opportunities for reading, rest, relaxation and reflection. Without the privileges that went with this position, the writing of this article would not be possible. I am also thankful to the Lord for my family, colleagues, and prayer partners who supported me in different ways throughout the laborious struggle in producing this article.

² Rosemary Calderbank, "Abuse and Disabled People: Vulnerability or Social Indifference?" *Disability and Society* 15, no. 3 (2000): 524; Margaret A. Nosek, Carol A. Howland, and Rosemary B. Hughes, "Investigation of Abuse and Women with Disabilities: Going Beyond Assumptions," *Violence Against Women* 7, no. 4 (April 2001): 478.

³ The earliest title I found was by Rooney Frances and Pat Israel, eds., *Beating the Odds: Violence and Women with Disabilities* (Vancouver, BC: Disabled Women's Network Canada Position Paper 2, 1985). From the mid-1990s, three books were published by G. Allan Roeher Inst Kinsman: *Violence and People with Disabilities: A Review of the Literature* (1995); *Harm's Way: The Many Faces of Violence and Abuse Against Persons with Disabilities* (1995); and *Answering the Call: The Police Response to Family and Care-Giver Violence Against People with Disabilities* (1996). A widely quoted book is by Dick Sobsey and Richard Sobsey, *Violence and Abuse in the Lives of People with Disability: The End of Silent Acceptance?* (Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co., 1997). Richard Sobsey edited an earlier book on bibliography entitled *Violence and Disability: An Annotated Bibliography* (Baltimore: P. H. Brookes, 1995).

⁴ Rizalio R. Sanchez, "Insights on Bangkok Workshop on Public Awareness on Disability," *Concern: For the Disabled Filipino* 25, no. 1 (1st Semester 2003): 16.

⁵ It is estimated that 7% to 10% of each country's population are PWDs. "Disability and Rehabilitation: Future Trends and Challenges in Rehabilitation," WHO, 3 December 2003, 1; accessed online 23 December 2003; available from <http://www.who.int/ncd/disability/trends.htm>. This means that there are currently 600 million PWDs in the world. "Disability and Rehabilitation," WHO, 3 December 2003, accessed online 23 December 2003; available from <http://www.who.int/ncd/disability>. Of the 600 million PWDs worldwide, 400 million live in Asia and Pacific Region. "Population and Social Integration Section: New Asian and the Pacific Decade of Disabled Person 2003-2012," accessed online 15 March 2004; available from <http://www.unescap.org/sps/disability.htm>.

⁶ For the definition of "impairment" and "disability" from the U.N. Decade of Disabled Persons 1983-1992, *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* (New York: United Nations, 1983), 1. c. 6-7, see Susan Wendell, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 262.

learning disabilities), and/or emotional/psychosocial. Some of these disabilities are congenital while others are due to aging or accidents. Some of the functioning incapacities are short term while others are chronic or lifetime.⁷

Violence defined

Because violence is sometimes culturally determined, there is a lack of a globally accepted definition of violence. Nevertheless, we still have to start somewhere to define the problem of abuse. 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.⁸

The kinds of violence perpetrated against PWDs are physical, sexual, emotional, financial⁹ and spiritual.¹⁰ When a person has the power to provide assistance, orthotic equipment, medication, nutrition, or transportation for the well-being of PWDs but intentionally withholds it, s/he commits violence. To deny PWDs community involvement, relationship, and employment when they are capable, and to treat them as non-persons are also considered acts of violence.¹¹ Church members, like the society, can look at PWDs with discrimination and prejudices. Having these demeaning attitudes, these members exclude PWDs from church functions, causing a sense of isolation for PWDs. In most churches, the ignorance and indifference of the members may lead to their neglect and disregard for the needs of members with disabilities. Though the members may not have any intention to harm those members with disabilities, nonetheless, at times, the latter may feel violated.

⁷ This is called the medical definition of disability. Keran Howe, "Violence Against Women with Disabilities: An Overview of the Literature," *Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA)*, 2000, 1-2; accessed online 21 November 2003; available from <http://www.wwda.org.au/keran.htm>. For more details of each category of disability, access **DISC (Disability Concerns)**, the electronic bulletin board of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church on disability issues and resources; available from <http://gbgm-umc.org/DISC/who-dsbl.stm>. In this article, I will not use the social construction of disability. It defines disability as caused by environmental and attitudinal barriers that do not afford PWDs equal opportunities to take part in the regular community life. From this perspective of disability, the removal of architectural and social barriers enables some PWDs to develop their potentials. It also factors in the reality that each culture and generation has a different perception of "normative" ability. Howe, 2. For an extended discussion of this social definition of disability, see Wendell, 264-267. For provocative and insightful objections against the sole use of the medical definition of disability, see Wendell, esp. 262-264.

⁸ "Violence—A Global Public Health Problem," Chapter 1 of *World Report on Violence and Health* (Geneva: WHO, 2002), 5; accessed online 23 December 2003; available from http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/chap1.pdf. The elements included in this definition are: intentionality in the use of power (whatever the outcome), the use of power (including negligence or acts of omission), and the consequences (that which harms the well-being of a person).

⁹ An example of financial abuse is the diversion of funds designated for a person with disability for use other than for that person. Nosek, Howland, and Hughes, 478; and Virginia Focht-New, "Beyond Abuse: Treatment Approaches for People with Disabilities, Part 1" *Positive Approaches* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 3; accessed online 23 October 2003; available from http://greg.quuxuum.org/journal/focht_new.html.

¹⁰ Some examples of spiritual abuse are: condemnation that all imperfections and disabilities are the result of sin; and judgment that "disabilities are merely the physical manifestation of imperfections of the soul." Mary Jane Owen, "Reflections on Disability and Organized Religion," *A Positive Approach* (Winter 1992-1993): 20. Also see Matthew Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Dennis Linn, *Healing Spiritual Abuse and Religious Addiction* (Metro Manila, Philippines: St Pauls Philippines, 1995), 11-15, 18, 115-126. My experience is another example of spiritual abuse. A kind-hearted lady advised me that if I have faith, I would be healed from my inability to walk. She had all the good intention to see me freed from braces and crutches, but she put the blame on me for not being healed from my congenital disability. Because she was ignorant of the whole biblical teaching about sickness, she ended up hurting me.

¹¹ Howe, p. 5; and Margaret A. Nosek and Carol A. Howland, "Abuse and Women with Disabilities," *Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse* (Feb 1998): 7; accessed online 2 November 2003; available from <http://www.vaw.umn.edu/documents/vawnet/disab/disab.html>.

The propensity of PWDs to experience violence

Aside from the functional impairment of PWDs which sometimes renders them unable to defend themselves, there are interrelated factors that make PWDs vulnerable to abuse. Below is a summary with examples:¹²

1. External attitudes that degrade: stereotyped perceptions that PWDs are defenseless and weak; the view that PWDs are a “case” in the medical environment rather than as a person; the stigma that PWDs are cursed by God or have sinned.
2. Internal attitudes that devalue: self-perceptions of PWDs as unworthy, and as an embarrassment, and/or a burden to others.
3. Physical environment that is handicapping: architectural inaccessibility, lack of adaptive equipment.
4. Social environment that is disempowering: over protectiveness; less opportunities for socialization and for learning about sexuality; no adequate government policies and programs to deal with abuses against PWDs.
5. Economic opportunities that are restrictive: financial deprivation, financial exploitation; lack of economic independence.
6. Relationships that perpetuate passivity: dependence on others for personal assistance; habitual submission to authorities, family members and caregivers; non-consultative advice from medical experts and other people.

The list shows that with handicapping situations around them, the PWDs can become even more powerless, hence the propensity to be abused.¹³

The silencing of the people with disabilities in scripture

Since ancient times, PWDs have been vulnerable to abuses. In Mark 10:46-52, we read about a certain Bartimaeus, a blind man who begged by the road. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he used what he could to call the attention of Jesus. The sighted people around him neither pointed him out to Jesus nor brought him to Jesus. Instead, they admonished him to be quiet! The silencing of Bartimaeus was a verbal abuse; underlying the abuse was a sense of superior power of the sighted over the sightless. Because of their sense of superiority, they degraded Bartimaeus, ostracized him and trivialized his needs.

A similar silencing can be read in the life of Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan (2 Sam. 9:1-13; 16:1-4; 19:24-30). Mephibosheth, who became lame due to an accident at the age of five, was fortunate to gain protection and support by King David, the best friend of his father. But when Absalom, the son of King David usurped his father’s throne, King David had to flee Jerusalem, leaving Mephibosheth under the care of Ziba, a servant, who betrayed him. Ziba did not comply

¹² Gregor Wolbring, “Violence and Abuse in the Lives of People with Disabilities,” *Violence and Abuse*, 1-5; accessed online 15 March 2004; available from

<http://www.thalidomide.ca/gwolbring/violence.html> or

<http://www.advocateweb.org/hope/frametop.asp?r=/hope/abuseofpersonswithdisabilities.asp>;

Mark Sherry, “Hate Crimes Against People with Disabilities,” *Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)*, 2000, 4; accessed online 12 January 2004; available from <http://www.wwda.org.au/hate.htm>; “Disability and Rehabilitation: Future Trends and Challenges in Rehabilitation” WHO, 2; and Focht-New, Part 1, 2-4.

¹³ The PWDs who are more vulnerable to violence are those with developmental disability, the young and the elderly, and women. Dick Sobsey, “Faces of Violence Against Women with Developmental Disabilities,” *Impact* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 2; Nosek, Howland, and Hughes, 480; and Leigh Ann Davis, “More Common Than We Think: Recognizing and Responding to Signs of Violence,” *Impact* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 8. Volume 13, No. 3 of *Impact* is the *Feature Issue on Violence Against Women with Developmental and Other Disabilities*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration, 2000); accessed online 25 February 2003; available from <http://jci.umn.edu/products/impact/newsletters.html>.

with Mephibosheth's wish to help him saddle the donkey so that he could flee Jerusalem with his protector; he even lied to King David, claiming that Mephibosheth had turned coat. His abuse of Mephibosheth caused a relational rift between David and Mephibosheth and gained for himself the wealth of Mephibosheth (=financial abuse). The deliberate refusal of Ziba to assist Mephibosheth when it was within his power to do so was an abuse which "silenced" and muted the loving and loyal intention of Mephibosheth to follow King David. Mephibosheth was thereby deprived of his protected status and financial security.

Since the realities of violence perpetrated against PWDs cannot be denied, we, who are people of the Church, the reflection of Christ's power, are to speak for the silenced. The following curriculum is a sample seminar material for local churches and theological institutions to use in empowering PWDs.

Recommended seminar curriculum on disability and violence for local churches and theological institutions

Overview of the curriculum

There are three parts in the recommended curriculum:

1. Premises on why people should be valued followed by discussion questions.
2. Biblical foundations for the protection of PWDs from violence. This part consists of two topics, each ending with discussion questions.
3. List of recommended readings most of which are internet accessible.

Some suggestions and advice on the use of the curriculum

Since this curriculum is for the empowerment of PWDs, the user of this curriculum will empower PWDs if s/he invites at least one person with disability as a resource person or as a participant in the seminar. The curriculum also deals with an issue in relation to disability—violence, so the PWDs would be the best people to share their experiences, needs, and feelings in relation to this topic.

The user of this curriculum can creatively employ various pedagogical methods such as: invitation of guest speakers who may or may not be PWDs, presentation of videos, viewing of movies, use of lecture and discussion, employment of debate, use of simulation exercises, exposure trip to places that serve PWDs, submission of reading reports, reflection paper (essay or poetry), and/or interview with PWDs and caregivers.

In this curriculum, biblical principles and discussion questions will be given. The user can always draw on the principles and questions as jumping board for further elaboration of the same points or related topics.

The recommended curriculum

I. Two premises for the seminar:

The valued norms of the current society are productivity and performance, health and youthfulness, intellect and beauty, position and money, independence and control. In any society, whatever is valued insidiously becomes a power that can be used by the one who possesses the valued item

against other people.¹⁴ From a Christian perspective, human beings are not equated with, and therefore valued for their capacities, appearances, possessions, and potentials. So the first premise of this seminar is that the worth of human beings lies in the fact that we are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1; 9:6; Jas. 3:9; "very good" in Gen. 1:31), and are loved by God who sacrificed Jesus on the cross to save us sinners to be reinstated as God's children (John. 1:10-13; 3:16-17; Rom. 3:23-26; Col. 1:19-23; 1 John. 3:1; 4:9-10).¹⁵ God's love was already there for us while we were sinners (Rom. 5:6-8; Eph. 1:4-5; 2:4-5; Col. 2:13-15). God loves us as God's created beings, not because we are related to someone, nor because we have achieved moral perfection, attained our potentials, contributed to society, or possessed something that is valuable (for example, knowledge, money, degree, social status, health, looks).

The second premise is that the most valued thing in life is knowing Jesus (Phil. 3:7-10; Eph. 4:13). Knowing Jesus is understanding the depth and extent of his love for us (Eph. 3:17b-19). It is from experiencing this love that we can imitate God and Jesus' love (Eph. 5:1-2).

From these two premises, we conclude that any ministry with and for PWDs must stem from the love which God and Christ has for us. This God- and -Christ-love protects one from valuing those powers that can be used against PWDs.

Discussion questions:

1. What are some of the cultural values used by church members to evaluate people, PWDs included?
2. Do I know of anyone with a disability in the church? How have I gauged him/her? Are my values in evaluating this person biblical?
3. What is one thing that I can do for this person to show the love of God?

II. Biblical foundation

Topic 1: The empowering presence of PWDs

Introduction: PWDs are often neglected, abandoned and forgotten in local churches. The scripture shares with us about the necessary and empowering presence of PWDs among us.

The Church is to acknowledge the necessary presence of each of its members, including those who look weak and who are truly powerless (1 Cor. 12:21-22).¹⁶ Those who are "weak"—real or apparent—may include PWDs. The PWDs' presence in Church is necessary and empowering because they play a role in keeping the Church unity.

PWDs need other people at various points in their lives and to various extents. Their presence reminds the Church that nobody can truly be self-sufficient and therefore be dispensed with (1 Cor. 12:21-22, cf. vv. 17-20). PWDs unveil the delusion that we can be totally self-reliant and individualistic.

¹⁴ On the different kinds of power, see Diana Mavunduse and Simon Oxley, *Why Violence? Why Not Peace?* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2002), 7-9; accessed online 5 March 2004; available from <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/dov.nsf/f2b3c6f6c91ade2ec1256bea002bc786/>

¹⁵ See John Macquarrie, "Theological Reflections on Disability," in *Religion and Disability: Essays in Scripture Theology and Ethics*, ed. Marilyn E. Bishop (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 27-45.

¹⁶ These are people in need. The word "lacked" in 1 Cor. 12:24b means to be in need. Those who are in need are those who "seem to be weaker", those whom people think are "less honorable", and those that are "unpresentable" (1Cor. 12:22-23). Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 614.

Individualism and self-sufficiency lead to one's attaching importance to powers, misuse of which leads to disunity. This was what happened to the church in Corinth. Because they thought they could dispense with other members of the church (1 Cor. 12:21), they used their various kinds of power¹⁷ that led to their division which was, in the end, disempowering.

The presence of PWDs also unveils the misconception that people can be superior over the inferior. Some people look at PWDs as weak and powerless, and look down upon them. Their sense of superior power over PWDs is actually false because they degrade on the basis of external appearance and societal standards of what is powerful and valued. Since their standards are questionable, their perception of the weakness and powerlessness of PWDs may be misleading.

This is exactly what Paul taught the Corinth church members: that those who "seem" weaker or those who "we think" are less worthy of honor may not be truly so (1 Cor 12:22-23). In that 1st-century church, those who felt stronger and more honorable thought they were better than others. So they dishonored the supposedly inferior by using the status and powers they felt they had because of which disunity and disempowerment resulted. (See 1 Cor. 11:17-22, esp. v. 22).

The presence of PWDs in the church, therefore, demolishes destructive and illusive ideas of individualistic independence and proud superiority that often lead to disunity.

The presence of PWDs can foster unity. Paul speaks of the necessary and indispensable presence of the weak—seemingly or otherwise—in the Church (1 Cor. 12:21-22) even as each member is needed (vv. 14-20). The tendency of any community is to hide those whom they consider as objects of embarrassment (v. 23). PWDs are sometimes seen as an embarrassing powerlessness. Paul taught that those who are weak—apparently or real—should be given special honor as God would have it (1 Cor. 12:23-24). Therefore, the PWDs among us, as people who may be weak, should be given special attention. When this special honor and care stems from the kind of love that one uses to love oneself ("equal concern for each other" in 1 Cor. 12:25; 1 Cor. 12:31b-13:13), the Church becomes a strong unified community. When members focus their attention and energy on caring for others and less on their own powers, this unity in love and care becomes the power of the church. The PWDs, when loved and cared for—just as any other members of the church are loved and cared for, then becomes the empowering presence engendering unity.

Discussion questions:

1. Who are the PWDs in your church?
2. How can your church unite together to provide respectful and non-condescending care for the PWDs?

*Topic 2: Advocacy for those who are silenced: The biblical teaching about advocacy*¹⁸

¹⁷ The church in Corinth, like the Corinthian society, valued powers of various kinds: knowledge power (1 Cor. 1:22b, 26b; 8:1-13), financial power (1:26b; 11:17-34), and status power (1:26b; dispute regarding who was their leader in 1 Cor. 1:10-12, 26b; 3:3-4, 21-22). In addition to the powers listed above, the Corinth church members valued another power—spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:4-7, 22; 12:1-11, 27-30). "The presence of the Spirit in power and gifts makes it easy for God's people to consider the power and gifts as the real evidence of Spirit's presence." Gordon E. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994), 158.

¹⁸ It is essential that PWDs be encouraged to advocate for themselves and to use whatever capacities and gifts they have. But self-advocacy through God's righteousness and offering one's abilities through God's power are beyond the scope of this article.

Introduction: Because of the functional incapacities of PWDs, sometimes they are unable to protect themselves. Therefore, they, at times, need other people to speak out on their behalf. The scripture has something to say about voicing out on other's behalf.

In the NT, "advocate" denotes helper and intercessor.¹⁹ In some instances, the legal sense of pleading on behalf of another is prominent (1 John. 2:1; John. 16:7-11).²⁰ One designation of Jesus is "advocate" (John. 14:16; 16:7; 1 John. 2:1).²¹ With God's Spirit of justice in Him, the advocacy of Jesus stems from His just and righteous character (Matt. 12:18; 1 John 2:1-2). Boldly, Jesus exposed the true character of the self-protective, legalistic religious leaders and declared the rightness of helping PWDs. These self-seeking leaders, under the pretext of the rightness of their religious rules, prioritized the less important over the important. In one example in Matthew's Gospel, the leaders valued their own financial resource, as represented by their sheep, over human beings whose physical and spiritual well-being needed to be advocated for (Matt 12:9-13).

Built on the premise of the value of PWDs (Matt. 12: 11-13), the just advocacy of Jesus was expressed in compassionate and gentle healing (Matt. 12:15b, 18c-d, 20). His advocacy was not a patronizing kind, for the PWDs participated in the way they could. For the man with the shriveled hand, he stretched out his shriveled hand as directed by Jesus (Matt.12:13). In the case of Bartimaeus, Jesus, in his compassion, did not ignore Bartimaeus' pleas for mercy.²² Even though Jesus knew what Bartimaeus needed, Jesus still asked him what he wanted before healing him. By doing so, Jesus respected Bartimaeus and his desire; this kind of participatory advocacy empowers PWDs (Mk. 10:46-52).

The Holy Spirit has been sent by God to take the place of Jesus on earth (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:17).²³ His main work is to witness for Jesus (John. 15:26) and to continue his work (John. 16:13-15). It is important to note that the Spirit "is not called in but sent (John. 14:26; 15:26; 16:17), given and received (John. 14:16f.). He does not merely put in a good word, but brings active help."²⁴ His active help includes giving a voice on behalf of weak believers (Rom. 8:26).

This Advocate-Spirit has come to dwell in believers both as individuals (1 Cor. 6:19) and as a Church community (John. 14:17; Rom. 5:5; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16). Since the Spirit testifies and witnesses to the advocacy of Jesus—which is just and participatory, and he actively mediates on behalf of the powerless and voiceless, we, the believing community, are enjoined to continue this advocating-interceding work and character of Jesus through the Spirit (John. 15:26-27; cf. Eph. 5:1).²⁵

¹⁹ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1979), vs. "Advocate," by G. Braumann. 89, 91. The Greek word for "advocate" is *paraklētos*. In the NIV, the Greek word is translated as "Counselor" in Jn. 14:16 and 16:7 and as "one who speaks to the Father in our defense" in 1 John. 2:1.

²⁰ *NIDNTT* 1:91.

²¹ In John. 14:16 and 16:7, it is implied that Jesus is the Counselor or Advocate as the Spirit is also another Counselor or Advocate.

²² It is worth mentioning that Bartimaeus did not allow the incapacity of his eyes to forget that he was not incapacitated to use his voice!

²³ *NIDNTT* 1:89-90. As our heavenly high priest, Jesus continues to be the advocate who intercedes for believers (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:24-28).

²⁴ *NIDNTT* 1:89.

²⁵ Though the work of helping others is enjoined of us, the word "advocate" is never of used of believers in the NT. *NIDNTT* 1:90.

Discussion questions:

1. What can the church, as a community of believers, do to imitate the advocacy spirit of the Godhead?
2. As an individual Christian, what can you do to begin the work of advocacy for one person with disability?

III. Recommended list for reading

Aside from the recommended online resources, journals, one newsletter and one magazine below, you may also want to read the literature in the bibliography.

Online accessible — annotation is given as needed.

Advocate Web. Accessed online 15 March 2004. Available from <http://www.advocateweb.org/hope/abuseofpersonswithdisabilities.asp>. This is a leading internet resource on the topic of abuse by professionals entrusted with authority and power. It has a section on resources on abuse against PWDs.

Brooke Ellison. "A Sociological Experiment in Changing Attitudes Toward Disability." 14 May 2002. Accessed online 5 March 2004. Available from <http://www.nod.org/content.cfm?id=946>. This article is about the author's experiment that won the Westinghouse Science Competition. The point of this short article is that when people experience interconnectedness with PWDs—the "humanizing factor", they let go of their stereotypes of PWDs.

"A Church of All and For All – An Interim Statement." Document # PLEN 1.1. World Council of Churches. Central Committee. Geneva, Switzerland. 26 August - 2 September 2003. Accessed online 21 March 2004. Available from <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/ccdocuments2003.nsf/index/plen-1.1-en.html>. This interim statement of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches is a reflection on major theological themes to help churches work towards being a more inclusive community for PWDs.

"Disability Convocation: Opening Hearts, Minds and Doors in Seminary Communities – Selected Bibliography." The National Organization on Disability – Religious Participation. 26 March 2002. Accessed online 5 March 2004. Available from <http://www.nod.org/content.cfm?id=856>. Prepared for the N.O.D.'s Disability Convocation held on March 15, 2002 (Friday) at Wesley Theological Seminary, this site lists 21 literatures on the inclusion of PWDs from a theological and practical perspective.

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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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ Attempts have been made globally to eradicate this problem.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.

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 (WOCATI), held in Chiang Mai, Thailand in December 8-13, 2002, I 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?"

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ See for instance the writings of Marie M. Fortune, such as: *Family Violence: A Workshop Manual for Clergy and Other Helpers* (Seattle, WA: 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*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ 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.

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 basis³⁰ about cases of violent sexuality brutality³¹ child molestation,³² incest,³³ rape³⁴ and attempted rape,³⁵ especially within the family and against children³⁶ and women. The two most common and serious forms of violence are sexual³⁷ and domestic³⁸ 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.”³⁹ While the documentation I have cited comes from Fiji, the 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.

³⁰I 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.

³¹B is alleged to have raped a 24-year old American tourist while she was taking a walk... the victim was repeated 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.

³²A 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 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.

³³Sanday 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.

³⁴Timoci 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 8years.” *The Daily Post*, Friday July 26, 2002, 1.

³⁵“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.

³⁶“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.

³⁷Sakiasi 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.”

³⁸“A domestic dispute between a couple living in a defacto relationship turned tragic when the man threw a punch a punch intended for his wife, who was breastfeeding their three month-old son, that landed on the infant, killing him almost instantly.” Tanya Mc Cutchen “Drunken Dad kills son with one punch” *The Daily Post*, Monday October 14, 2002.1

³⁹Imran Ami, “Father Under Probe for Sex Crimes” *The Fiji Times*, November 15, 2002, 3.

There is unfortunately no space in this paper to address the seriousness of the problem of violence against children.⁴⁰ Nor will we be able to discuss the many forms and roots of 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.⁴¹

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.⁴²

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 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

⁴⁰ "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 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

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

⁴² *The Daily Post*, March 22, 2002, 3.

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.⁴³

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*.⁴⁴ Men especially resort to physical violence⁴⁵ 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 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

⁴³ The source wishes to remain anonymous.

⁴⁴ Often both partners contribute to the 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.

⁴⁵This 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).

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,⁴⁶ 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,⁴⁷ civil societies⁴⁸ and private sector groups. The 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,

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ These are the beginnings of some small initiatives by governments, such as the following noted in a *Fiji Times* article (although it is of interest that the following initiative 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 Problems of Women,” *The Fiji Times*, November 15, 2002, 5.

⁴⁸ 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 expected of the church, i.e. The Fiji Women’s Crisis Center (FWCC), The Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM), Ecumenical Center for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA). etc

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,⁴⁹ 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, 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 field, for no concrete link

⁴⁹ 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.

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.⁵⁰ 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

⁵⁰ 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.

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.

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 drafted⁵¹ 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 Oceania⁵² 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.⁵³

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.

⁵¹ The questionnaire form is in the author’s possession.

⁵² 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.

⁵³ The responses are in the author’s possession.

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.⁵⁴ 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 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

⁵⁴ The six (three women and three men) are members of five different denominations. Their ages vary from early 50s to early 70s.

schools based in Fiji, inviting various experts to speak on “Violence against Women: and the Struggle Against it.”⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁵ The Forum was held at the Pacific Theological College on April 5, 2003. The speakers were: Mridula Prasad (Medical Doctor), (Joni Madraiwiwi (Lawyer), Seluini Akauola (Roman Catholic Priest), Alefina Vuli (Director, Ministry of Women, Fiji), and Edwina Kotoisuva (Deputy Director, Fiji Women’s Crisis Center).

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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**ON VIOLENCE AND PEACE-MAKING:
A CHALLENGE FOR ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

Mandy Tibbey

Issues in peace-building

How can we be a blessing to our communities?

How can we Christians and our churches be a blessing to our communities? This is a serious question in a world where too often the churches act and react as political players with narrow interests to protect rather than as salt and as servants of all for the sake of Christ. In the midst of pain and suffering in the world, God beckons us to love, to show compassion, to forgive, to do justice, to live generously, and to strengthen peace.

We read in the beatitudes, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” A peacemaker is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as “one who brings about peace”. This denotes an active involvement, getting one’s hands dirty in the cause of peace, way beyond inspiring sermons, important though they may be as part of a process of peace-making and peace-building. To merely talk “peace” without being willing to enter into the grist of “bringing about” peace is empty, hollow and lacking in credibility.

Peace is a gift from God (John 14: 26-27). Peace, truth and righteousness belong together. We read in Isaiah 32: 15-18:

And the effect of righteousness will be peace; and the result of righteousness quietness and trust forever.

As Christians, we have the whole “armour of faith” as St Paul puts it, to build peace. We are exhorted in Ephesians 6:14-17:

Fasten the breastplate of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these take the shield of faith... the helmet of salvation and the...word of God.

Active involvement in peace-making is a tangible way of demonstrating God’s love for humanity, of serving the entire community and of pre-figuring the sort of world God wants. Ministerial formation which equips the saints for this work of God is vital. Too often, clergy tip-toe around conflict in communities, look the other way, or may be too busy and “pass by on the other side”, failing to examine causes, bind up wounds and help restructure social arrangements in a more just way, to prevent future violence.

Theological education should offer opportunities to the laity, as well as to those seeking ordination, to become more theologically “literate”, so that those who are happy to serve in various capacities in the community will have a fuller understanding of the underpinnings of such action in terms of their faith. This will result in a rich interplay and deep complementarity between ordained and lay people. In this article it is assumed that both lay people and clergy are and can be involved in peace-building. It will also assume that both should be able to participate in and contribute to ecumenical theological education.

For churches, conscientious individual clergy or committed lay people to be seriously involved in peace-making there are some pre-requisites: firstly humility, the ability to recognise that others may have been working on peace-building long before we realised it was an issue. This implies willingness to learn from and engage with civil society movements working for peace. Secondly, solidarity and the ability to work alongside the people of God who are suffering due to violence and

oppression and to fashion strategies to help transform that violence. Thirdly, creativity, willingness to experiment, to be wanderers as Jesus was a pilgrim people.

It is important to challenge the idea that making peace and building peace are “somebody else’s job.” Peace-building and peace-making are too important to be left alone with the politicians, powerful people and experts. Each of these may have interests inimical to peace. But they are more likely to play a positive role if there is a groundswell of “public opinion” seeking peace. Churches may help generate and reflect such public opinion, as part of the communities we seek to serve. It is communities who suffer from violence and communities who must struggle to end it. Churches and Christians are part of the community and cannot stand aloof when God’s people are being massacred, raped, tortured, driven from their homes, when hatred is nursed, driven and vented and ugly discrimination practiced.

Courageous church workers and leaders who stand with people in the midst of violence and oppression are powerful emblems of the strength of sacrificial love. In the Solomon Islands last year, when guns were being fired across villages, the Melanesian Brothers, an Anglican order of brothers, walked across the firing lines, pleading, cajoling and encouraging people to stop the violence. Their example shamed people into silencing their guns.

For many years during the occupation of East Timor by Indonesia, Bishop Carlos Belo of East Timor spoke out bravely about killings, rapes, burning of houses and fields, in an attempt to rouse international public opinion about the ghastly events unfolding there. He boldly negotiated with the Indonesian military time after time, despite many threats to his life. After the Sta Cruz massacre in 1991, where scores of people were mown down by the Indonesian military, he demanded to go to the hospital where people had been taken, visited them and ministering to them and allowed many fearful people to stay at his residence.⁵⁶ This must have taken great courage. But it was possible.

The ecumenical movement has long been involved in courageous actions for peace. The work of the Asian Christian Service, through which doctors, social workers and nurses lived with the people of Indochina through the Vietnam War and the associated war in Laos and Cambodia, is an historical example of this⁵⁷. In our own time, the African churches act in solidarity with each other as election monitors, through the ecumenical movement, to monitor the elections in various countries in Africa. This is an example of peace-building through strengthening a democratic institution, namely elections. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel is another example of Christians placing themselves in the midst of conflict situations and trying to make a difference, towards peace.

This sort of work for peace is costly. The mere idea of becoming involved in such situations may be enough to cause most of us to shy away from doing whatever it is that we are able to do for peace. But we don’t all have to place ourselves “on the front line” in order to make a contribution. Pastors and church workers who are skilled may play a role in educating the community in how to make peace. This may involve committed work with community groups in considering the causes of conflict, the parties involved, their needs and fears and developing strategies to effectively deal with the conflict.

What sort of theological education is needed?

Although Jesus learned and taught in the temple, he also learned and taught in the fields, on fishing boats, over dinner with friends, whilst walking from one place to another, on mountain tops and by the shores of lakes. Yet theological education too often seems focussed upon teaching for service “in the temple”. Getting out of the classroom and engaging in experiential learning and teaching “on the streets” with workers, urban poor, sex workers, racial and sexual minorities can be undertaken

⁵⁶Arnold S. Kohen, *From the Place of the Dead: the Epic Struggle of Bishop Belo of East Timor*, St Martins Press, New York, 1999.

⁵⁷See M. Tibbey “Looking Back: Asian Christian Service: A Significant Chapter in CCA history through the eyes of Participants”, *CCA News* Vol 37, No 2, June 2002,29.

as a structured part of a theological program. This would serve to underline the message that we are to be servants in the world in all of its grime.

So engaging would shift many theological institutions from being isolated enclaves and mission compounds to being fully engaged in their communities. Instead of, or as well as placing students in parishes and congregations as part of their programs, why not develop assignments where they live and work with people and groups in the community, developing friendships and integrating with the people God loves, with appropriate supervision and reflection? Visiting, being alongside and in solidarity with those who experience injustice and un-peace, whether because of caste, race, gender, disability, sexuality, class or global structures is a highly effective methodology for developing understanding of the situation of others. It can be undertaken by the smallest theological institution and can be done ecumenically.

Associated with this concept is the need for theological education to encompass some study and analysis of the society in which the institution is located, its institutions and possibilities. Peace-builders need to have eyes wide open and be able to understand and relate with the “players” in their societies, to be well aware of mechanisms to call abusers to account, such as the press, commissions against corruption, police, courts, lobbying, work with NGOs, people’s organisations, through traditional cultural institutions and so on.

Women can be vitally involved in peace-building

Too often, in conflict situations, the contribution that women can make to peace is marginalised, to the great detriment of the community. Women are half of the adult population, often highly trained and well able to be fully involved in peace-building. Churches which are structured around male clergy need to be particularly careful not to ignore or minimise the contributions of women.

In Bougainville, an island off the tip of Papua New Guinea and officially incorporated into it by colonial boundaries, people were fed up with the central government of PNG and an independence struggle broke out in 1988. It developed into a painful civil war, involving strategic ham-letting, killing, rape, destruction of property and public schools and a hospital. By 1996 there had been a number of official attempts at peace talks between protagonistists...all men.

Almost everyone on the island has a church affiliation. The church women of Bougainville from the four major denominations (United Church, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist and Pentecostal) were able to unite to form a committee. They negotiated with the occupying PNG Defense Force to allow a conference of church women to be held and arranged a boat to pick women up around the island for the conference. 700 Bougainvillean women met, in the middle of the civil war, from all sides of the conflict, to discuss the impact of it upon communities and what should be done in the future. The Bougainville Inter-Church Women’s Forum took shape. Women pastors, teachers, nuns, mothers, nurses worked together for peace.

The women sat for some days and talked together, surrounded by tanks, military and spies. But they talked! Eventually it was so threatening to the occupying force that they broke up the conference, but it was too late, the women had seen a future and it was not war. They had discussed, from their own villages, what was needed by communities. From then on, women were always included in future peace talks and communities began to take their own initiatives, not so dependent on so-called political leaders to determine the way forward. The ability to build a future was put back into the hands of communities, where it belongs. There is now a strong Bougainvillean regional government and a promise by the central government of a referendum on independence within a fixed period.

Women in various organisations are still active in the peacemaking in Bougainville, in trauma counseling, assisting to ensure that young people who missed out on education because they were fighting are given education and re-integrated into communities, developing economic livelihood projects and the like.

In Ambon, Indonesia, torn apart by violence which erupted between the previously neighborly communities of Christians and Muslims, the road back from brutal mutilation, killing, burning of houses and crops has been a long one. Again, Muslim and Christian women (from both Protestant and Catholic churches) meeting together helped build trust between the communities, slowly overcoming prejudices and enmities and jointly strategising ways to re-build unity in communities. The Muslim and Christian women are leading opinion-makers in their communities and, together do much to build peace.

Some of these women stood very bravely at the height of the conflict. Ibu Zul Latuoncina, a prominent Muslim lawyer, 35 years a police prosecutor, tells how, at the height of the violence in Ambon, a group of young Muslim men had come to her house to warn her that they planned to bomb a house of a Christian family near her home. They wanted her to evacuate or to take shelter. Instead of leaving the Christian family to that fate, she told the group "Well, if you want to bomb that house, then you will have to bomb my house first." They did not do so and went away.

Communities can build peace

There are many good examples of communities taking matters into their own hands and Christians playing a role in that process. In Australia the process of "reconciliation" between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians was announced by the national government in the 1990's. It was initially suspected by many as likely to involve empty gestures, a government "white-wash". But because people's movements, both black and white, around the country have taken the concept and invested it with meaning, action, symbol and practical change, the process has become meaningful.

The reconciliation process in Australia has enabled committees around the country to stand with Aboriginal people against very destructive amendments to the Aboriginal land rights, in organising rallies and symbolic actions. One of these included being able to sign a national petition against those changes. This was made into a sea of thousands of cardboard hands on small sticks, which were stuck into the ground on the green slopes outside parliament house, a potent gesture of refusal to allow injustice to be continued, which made front page news.

Peace-building involved churches in getting to know Aboriginal people and understanding how they felt to have been taken away from their Aboriginal parents. Known as the "stolen generations" they were raised in sometimes harsh "Christian" institutions with white families; some churches even agreed to a form of reparation and all of the churches have increased their advocacy to urge justice from government. "Sorry books" in which non-Aboriginal Australians wrote how they felt about the taking of children from their parents could be signed in shopping centres, schools and churches around the country. This stood starkly against the refusal of the current Prime Minister John Howard to apologise to Aboriginal people for the taking of children from their parents.

As part of the process of reconciliation, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians have worked with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descendants of those involved in massacres, to deal with the traumatic memory of massacres. Those communities have been able to meet together, talk, engage in symbolic action to represent the sorrow of both communities at the ghastly deeds of the past. In Central Australia non-Aboriginal Christians have worked with Aboriginal communities to move monuments which were very offensive to Aboriginal people of the area, as an indication of respect for their culture.

In Ambon, it is the communities themselves who are able to build a durable peace. Institutions such as the “Team Twenty Committees”, comprising equal numbers of Muslim and Christian representatives of a particular village proved to be valuable “peace-keeping” bodies. They were able to check out rumours and possible false reports, the work of agent provocateurs, in a situation which is possibly being stirred up by powerful interests for their own ends. This mechanism prevented the escalation of violence.

In being involved in peace-making, there will be situations where it is helpful to the process for Christians to be prominently identified as such (for example by wearing clergy garb, carrying flags indicating that they are Christian). In the Philippines, during many types of demonstrations, nuns, priests, pastors and seminarians dress to be identifiable because of the “symbolic capital” that church involvement brings to a movement. In Australia, during peace marches on Palm Sunday, Hiroshima Day and during the anti-Iraq war demonstrations in 2003, some clergy chose to wear clerical collars or crosses and many church groups carried banners in the huge marches, to indicate that church communities were against the war in Iraq.

But there are other situations where it is better not to highlight the Christian identity of those working for peace. This may be particularly so where Christians are a small minority and/or the state is not well disposed towards Christians. It is not important that the church “gets credit” for involvement. It may be more appropriate simply to serve, to be “salt” and “leaven” within a larger group.

Forgiveness and peace

Jesus placed great emphasis on forgiveness, which in the Lord’s Prayer falls only after our request to God for the basic sustenance of life, our “daily bread”. Bodily, psychological and spiritual sustenance (in knowing that that we have forgiven and those we are forgiven) belong together and are intimately related. So we read in Matthew 6: 11-12:

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.

And in Luke 11: 3-4:

Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
for us we forgive everyone indebted to us.

The connection between bread and forgiveness, between bodily sustenance and psychic and spiritual food and growth is highlighted by the “And” between bread and forgiveness. In the context of the request we make of God to forgive us our sins, we state in the Lord’s Prayer, “*for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.*” Such placement underlines what hypocrites we would be to ask for the forgiveness of God without forgiving each other.

We are not asked to forgive the sins done to others. The word “us” after “forgive” suggests that we are asking for the forgiveness of sins in which WE are involved.

Churches and Christians have too often in the past excused the sins of the rich and powerful against people who are poor, weak, vulnerable and marginalised. But that is not forgiveness, or reconciliation, it is complicity in oppression. As the prophet Jeremiah puts it:

They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying “Peace, peace” where there is no peace.

Thus, the churches have sometimes excused those wealthy people and corporations who do not pay just wages, the landlords who exploit tenant farmers and powerful people within the churches who have abused their power to wreak the violence of sexual and psychological abuse upon others.

In doing so, we have bludgeoned those who have experienced violence into an alienated suppression of their pain! In doing so we have obscured the Christ who “weeps for the wounding” of each of his friends and obscured the God who is reaching out “with healing hands”.⁵⁸

On the contrary, we cannot seek the forgiveness of God for our own sins and claim that we “forgive those who have sinned against us” unless we are fully engaged in struggles for justice around us. Such involvement must include proper recognition of the pain that others have experienced and their right and need for confession, restitution, reparation and renewal.

As Genevieve Jacques of the WCC puts it: “When we say that there is no reconciliation without forgiveness, no reconciliation without truth, no reconciliation without justice, no reconciliation without peace, we...should not forget that genuine reconciliation involves *all* these dimensions *together* – not one instead of the other, nor one after the other, like steps leading up to the goal. This wider vision understands reconciliation as a single and inclusive goal... working for reconciliation therefore means promoting through our words and actions, love *and* truth *and* justice *and* peace, all at the same time.”⁵⁹

Forgiveness, properly understood, is a rich and peace-promoting concept which has been given to us for the living of satisfying lives. Yet, as Christians we rarely explain to individuals or to groups HOW to forgive, although forgiveness is a foundational concept in our faith.

It is time for greater ecumenical exploration of the richness of the theological, psychological, social aspects of forgiveness. The concept of forgiveness is so difficult to practice that we have not yet fully explored it. We have not sufficiently identified, understood and articulated the social issues surrounding corporate or individual forgiveness. Whilst there is some literature on the topic, it is usually directed personally rather than to groups and is not widely read. It is time to look far more deeply into the question of how to forgive, as a contribution that the ecumenical movement could make to the world.

Movements outside the church⁶⁰ have suggested that some steps in the process of forgiveness may include:

- understanding that the story of the conflict that we have is our version and that there are other perspectives;
- being able to separate what happened from what we made it mean (either about myself or about my community or group);
- trying to shut off the “judging” part of our makeup which blocks really active listening;
- accepting that what happened has happened but that we can choose to leave it in the past, rather than bringing it with us into the future;
- examining what we are gaining out of holding onto grievances;
- examining what it is costing us to hold onto those grievances;
- taking responsibility for whatever part we may have played in the conflict;
- being willing to leave behind a sense of being right and the other party wrong.

Establishing contact with the other party, frankly confessing our own part in a conflict and stating our desire to forgive, to leave a sense of grievance behind will help us to move on, regardless of the response of the other party to this. Undertaking this step will give us a greater sense of completeness about whatever has gone wrong in the past. It may even open a new space for a gracious response from the other party and new possibilities for relating. But at the very least, it will help us to leave the past in the past, instead of dragging it around with us.

⁵⁸ D. McRae-McMahon, *Liturgies for the Journey of Life*, SPCK, Great Britain, 2000, at 66.

⁵⁹ G. Jacques, *Beyond Impunity: An Ecumenical Approach to Truth, Justice and Reconciliation*, WCC Publications, 2000.

⁶⁰ See for example the programs of Landmark Education Ltd.

Experiences of countries in transition such as South Africa and East Timor as to how to deal with the painful realities of the past should assist us in learning what is effective in promoting true forgiveness, reconciliation or at least acceptance of the past and renewal. These experiences and processes could fruitfully be studied, alongside the experience of those working with small groups and individuals in dealing with painful memories and history so as to heal and transform it.

Building confidence and capacity in peace-building – curriculum issues

Ecumenical theological education needs to find new ways to inspire and equip people of all faiths and move to engage together in peace-building. One very innovative and effective peace-building program is the Young Ambassadors for Peace (‘YAP’) program of the Uniting Church in Australia (‘UCA’). It is an example of what Tania Paffenholz has called “community-based bottom-up peace building”.⁶¹ This program began in 2001 and is working in Solomon Islands, PNG, Sri Lanka, Ambon, Indonesia and North East India. The UCA works in partnership with its partner churches in each of those places to strengthen peace.

The program aims to bring together young people from “opposing” groups, carefully selected by their own communities for their leadership abilities, for an intensive program of living and sharing together. The method of the program draws greatly on use of people’s theatre, with groups devising and performing role plays, frozen images and skits as a basis for discussion of community problems. In the Solomon Islands, for example, the community problems identified by the young people as being impediments to peace were included dynamite fishing, over-consumption of homebrewed alcohol, land disputes and water rights.⁶²

Use of community “games” as teaching tools builds a sense of unity, fun and enjoyment of shared time so that friendships grow among the participants. But the games have a point: they are really parables, pointing to a deeper reality about community, teamwork, sharing and helping one another. The sense of unity which develops is often quite unexpected by participants. Some come with great distrust of “opposing groups,” as in Sri Lanka. Others have a degree of disinterest in other groups, as in North-East India, where the minority hill tribes such as the Khasi, Garo, Kuki, Naga identify strongly with their own groups but have very little identification with those of other groups. This friendship and sense of unity opens up new possibilities for understanding and action. An open steering committee guides evaluation of each day.

The young people consider their own prejudices, and then burn them in a moving ceremony to indicate their commitment to eradicating them. They discuss their feelings in undertaking that and this may surface many pent-up emotions. They devise their own cleansing rituals, and then look at their own situations by creating a map of their country or conflict area, locating the conflict and identifying other significant features geographically and socially. They then proceed to map the conflict, identifying parties and their needs and fears and draw timelines plotting the history of conflicts. They study human rights, mediation and negotiation in action workshops, discuss community organising and they consider what small steps they may be able to take for peace. An action plan is prepared.

Because the method is action-oriented, people from all strata of society, all levels of education and men and women can learn together and contribute equally to the program. Barriers are thus, for a short time perhaps, broken down and a glimpse emerges of a world where all are respected and valued. This is very valuable and, again, opens up new possibilities for action and provides new insights.

Participants undertake their own analysis (‘mapping’) with the assistance of graphic visual portrayal of situations and discussion. This, together with friendship, study of human rights and

⁶¹ T. Paffenholz, *Community-based Bottom-up Peace building*, Life and Peace Institute, Sweden, 2003.

⁶² Freedom, *International Human Rights Update*, Uniting Church in Australia, March 2004, 9.

specific methods of dealing with conflict result in a sense that each person can make a difference and participants thus feel empowered to return to their communities together to take “small steps to peace”.

This program offers a new way of conducting conscientization programs. Rather than the “absorption method” based around eminent experts lecturing a mass of people, the method takes the experience of people seriously and facilitates people working together to analyse, reflect and plan. Whilst there is still some “input” about uses of power, mapping, human rights and mediation, from resource people drawn from around the region,⁶³ the method is focussed on involvement of participants. It leaves participants knowing that they matter and can contribute, which should promote action.

This program has been used with groups composed entirely of Christians, in the Pacific and North-East India; with groups of Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims in Sri Lanka; and with Christians and Muslims in Indonesia. When used with a group composed entirely of Christians, daily devotions can be incorporated, singing of hymns and gospel songs and the faith underpinnings of working for peace articulated.

With interfaith groups, unity has been built without reference to religion. In Ambon, time for silent prayer together, Muslim and Christian has its own beauty. In Sri Lanka participants were asked to share a symbolic act of cleansing from their own religious tradition. In each program, it is known that those initiating the program are Christian, but the religion of each group is respected. This means allowing specific prayer times for Muslims and ensuring that some of those providing inspirational or other talks are from the religions represented, rather than all being Christian.

In a number of places where the program is becoming known, the whole community supports the participants. For instance, in the Solomon Islands, one program held in a small community saw groups within the village delegated to take care of providing food and to pray, welcome and encourage each participant. Each night the group responsible for the day dined with the participants to hear their sharing and reflection. In Tari, in the highlands of PNG the program was welcomed by the community with full traditional dress and dancing. It was held in an open-style church and was continually surrounded by villagers watching all the time, some even taking notes!⁶⁴ Such active involvement of the community provides a solid basis of community support which should promote, support and strengthen the community’s commitment to peace.⁶⁵

Interfaith work and use of international human rights instruments

One issue which arises in interfaith peace-building work is how to articulate and develop common values. In this, the United Nations international human rights instruments may be of great assistance. Of course there will be other points around which unity could be developed, such as shared history, culture and traditional cultural practices and ceremonies and, more immediately, the specific problem at hand. But nevertheless, the international human rights instruments are a further source of potential unity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is accepted internationally as a benchmark, setting out basic human rights. It can be found in 300 languages on the United Nations website.

Most other major human rights instruments have been very widely ratified and also indicate current internationally agreed standards⁶⁶. Documents such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention

⁶³ The writer has acted as a team member and resource person on human rights, negotiation and mediation in a number of programs. The Co-ordinator of the YAP program is Ms Joy Balazo.

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.*, 3.

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, 8.

⁶⁶ See generally P. Alston and H. Steiner, *International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals: Text and Materials*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996.

on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention Against Torture and other Cruel and Unusual Punishment repay careful reading. Even where countries have not ratified them, such failure may still be a unifying point for the coalescing of interfaith groups. Failure to ratify such instruments indicates a lack of accountability and transparency by non-ratifying national governments in the area by the international instrument.

General Assembly statements such as Declaration on Development provide internationally agreed “starting points” for discussion and action. Documents which have not yet reaching sufficient international (i.e. governmental) consensus to have become declarations of the General Assembly or conventions are still useful indicators of the international dialogue being conducted. An example is the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: national governments at the United Nations balked at the rights proposed for protection by indigenous peoples who had worked on the document over many years. Nevertheless, the Draft Declaration is a valuable statement of the perspectives and aspirations of indigenous peoples at a given point in time.

The United Nations human rights instruments have been developed by people from all faith traditions (and none) and provide a language to articulate common concerns with legitimacy derived from international acceptance of the standards set out in the documents, at least as standards to be aspired for. In the case of conventions which have been ratified, they are standards against which governments have agreed to have their national performance measured and critiqued. In this process, international experts (known as “treaty bodies”) review periodic national reports, ask awkward and difficult questions and provide assessments to national governments and the international community.

These international human rights instruments are not often enough known and utilized within the Christian community or probably any other religious tradition for that matter. Yet they are extremely valuable in an interfaith peace-building context. A famous Muslim scholar, Abdullahi A. An-Na'im highlights the importance of religious groups being open and attentive to human rights language and practice and also to supporting secularism by the state. He suggests that there is a synergistic and interdependent relationship between these three: religion needs human rights in order to protect the human rights of believers, to ensure freedom of belief and practice and liberative development of religion; human rights needs secularism for political stability and mediating conflicts among different religious communities; secularism needs human rights as a normative guide against abuses by the state and needs religion as a practical moral guide for believers.⁶⁷ This thoughtful assessment should be taken to heart by ecumenists. It provides a way of bringing together these paradigms which are all too often seen as either unrelated, in tension or in outright conflict.

Conclusion

Peace-building and peace-making has many facets. The discussion above outlines but a few of these. Yet the sharing of experiences of peace-building and the perspectives which arise from that work will hopefully promote further thinking and experimentation. The ecumenical movement will be known by its fruit. If we are able to strengthen peace, this will be an invaluable contribution to our troubled world.

⁶⁷A. An-Na'im, *Human Rights, Religion and Secularism*, in *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions*, Joseph Runzo, Nancy Martin and Arvind Sharma (eds), One world Publications, England, 2003, 26 at 37-38.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES¹

Per Lindblad

Violence as a means of control

This paper focuses on the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as an example. The research on relationship of religion and violence has done in a number of studies. Attention has been paid mainly to the conflicts between different religious cultures as well as in measuring their consequences. The occurrence of violence inside religious communities has seldom been studied. However, most religious communities use violence in order to control their members. The difference among them lies in the means of subjecting. Often the goals of communities sanctify the violent means used.

When we take a look at religious behavior from the point of view of the newest methods of social psychology and cultural research, we find absolutely new perspectives on religious behavior that can be used by communities for evaluating their actions.

Preaching love as an employment

Work of an individual is rarely considered a way of earning money in a religious community, even when one is paid a compensation for work. Preaching God's word as a calling seems to bear very small resemblance to, for example, the work of an employee working in a Nokia mobile phone factory. However, the same laws and regulations direct behavior of the workers in parishes and religious meetings as well as behavior of those working elsewhere.

The development of legislation on working conditions has been one of the reasons for paying attention to working conditions in parishes in Finland. Especially Occupational Safety Act, that came into force in 2003 sets every employer under great obligations of taking care of physical, mental and social health of their workers when completing their tasks. Public discussion has been started on maintaining employee's ability to work in parishes as well as on such topics as discrimination against women, homosexuality of the employees' and workplace violence in parishes. These topics were previously thought to be private and forbidden themes.

Working in a parish

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has been divided into 9 dioceses, which has accordingly been divided into 586 parishes. Dioceses are led by separate governing bodies, which are led by bishops. 84, 6 % of the population belongs to parishes. Parishes carry out their basic task, which has been defined in the legislation of the church, either independently or as groups of parishes in their geographically defined areas. The highest decision-making powers of a parish belong to the Parish Council, which consists of elected members of the congregation. There is also the Parish Board, which is chosen by the Parish Council, as well as boards and committees that are subordinate to the Parish Board.

There are about 21,000 employees in the Lutheran Church. 70 % of the workers are female. Altogether 42 % of the personnel are involved in spiritual work. This includes pastors, deacons and youth workers. There are about 1900 priests in Finland, 30 % of them are women. Twenty three per cent of the personnel take care of the cemeteries, as the Church in Finland maintains them. The maintenance of the real estate is carried out by 21 % of the personnel, and 14 % of the employees have an administrative, financial or other office work. Even if women can serve as pastors, Church

can be seen as a patriarchy, as it has traditionally been lead by men. There are hundreds of types of offices and jobs for the hired personnel.

The main task of the parish administration is a difficult one: to bring the general ethical aspirations, expressed in the Church legislation, into life. The lack of communication between the employees and church members, division of the members of a church into laypeople and pastors, which leads to biased division of tasks and roles as well as attitude towards general changes in the society have caused problems. At best working in a parish can offer an employee a chance to fulfill what he or she feels is her task in the Church in compliance with his or her conviction, in a very motivated and satisfying way. For the same reason a working community may turn into an endless nightmare, when the values of a working community and individuals clash with each other.

Workplace violence

To have a sense of coping with life, one has to have a feeling of being able to participate in decision making. One also needs a feeling of being accepted as a full member of a community, who is capable of taking decisions and has equal rights. This is not always the case in the working communities in our parishes. There are phenomena in the field of interaction in working communities that are linked to losing one's feeling of well-being. One of the most significant of them is workplace violence. In a broad sense workplace violence, or violence faced at work, includes situations, when a person has been assaulted or threatened at work in a way, that his or her safety, well-being or health have been put at a risk directly or indirectly. It seems that most researchers and legislators both in Finland and abroad have started using this broad definition. The Occupational Safety Act observed at workplaces in the parishes of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is based on the same definition, too.

Workplace violence is either physical or psychological. Instances like hitting and beating, pinching, pushing, jostling, squeezing breasts and raping are all considered physical violence. Threatening with violence is considered a crime, too. Psychological violence, or bullying at work, is meant, when someone repeatedly becomes a victim of negative behavior, bullying, oppression, name-calling, ridiculing or subjecting by a colleague, superior or employee for a long period of time. A victim of psychological violence feels unable to defend him or herself.

Raping, beating or subjecting can be done under the guise of religion as well. According to the legislation of Finland one has no right to violate basic human rights of an individual, not even under the guise of religion. Discrimination at work is considered a crime, too, whether it occurs on the basis of gender, age, race or religious conviction. The Occupational Safety Act that came into force in 2003 in workplaces of Finland demands, that all employers, religious ones as well, are obliged to monitor the situation at workplace and take appropriate action in order to sort out and prevent accidents, health hazards and dangerous situations.

Psychological violence in the parishes of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Due to the special nature of religious communities I have approached the evaluation of behavior in them by combining traditional ways of observing working conditions with views on social constructionism by Rom Harré and model of coping (internal and external coping) theory of Aron Antonovsky when processing the information gathered through my surveys and interviews. When making analyses I used software programmes made for analysing both statistics and texts. In my research I discovered, that 8 % of the surveyed had weekly faced psychological violence at workplace in their parish. The same was shown by the working life barometer, which was carried out by the Church in 2002. According to the barometer, 4 % of the employees said they were objects of psychological violence at the very moment and 12 % reported that they had been bullied at work earlier.

Jealousy, cliques, inequality and open disagreements were reported in 66 % of the parishes according to the results. Information was not openly shared and problems were kept secret at workplaces. Employees felt isolated in their working communities and the relationships in the parish seemed superficial. The leadership was considered passive. Feedback on the work was often forgotten, and the superior did not encourage employees to develop their professional skills.

Many employees felt the amount of work overwhelming and sharing Christ's love seems to become like "forced-labour" according to the working life barometer of the Church. Experiencing haste was very common among the employees of the Church. Even if pastors are not included in the Working Hours Restriction Act in Finland, they have a right to have two days off every week. However, over half of them reported, that they were not able to take days off once a month or more often. And 44 % reported that their social life had been reduced to a minimum because of haste at work. 63 % of the surveyed reported knowing at least one female and 47 % at least one male colleague, who had become victims of psychological violence at their workplace. Even up to 77 % of the surveyed reported having been bullied or harassed at some point at workplaces with over 60 employees.

Diminishing personal qualities of the workers, psychological isolation from the working community, changing duties without justified reasons, appealing to religion, smear campaigns, sexual molestation and harassment as well as physical violence were listed as forms of workplace violence in parishes.

Most widespread forms were isolation from the working community by silence and ignoring opinions on one hand and by gossiping and smearing behind one's back on the other hand. Two thirds of the employees in parishes suffered from gossiping and smearing.

Discrimination and unequal treatment in parishes could be linked e.g., to the age, gender, having or not having a family, type of job contract and way of practicing religion. The type of job contract, non-permanent job in other words, was considered the most common reason for discrimination according to the working life barometer of the Church of Finland. Of the surveyed 21 % had experienced discrimination at the moment of employment.

Discrimination against women was common, too: 14 % of the surveyed felt that they had been discriminated against because of their gender. Eight percent felt that they had been discriminated against as they had or did not have a family or had been pregnant.

Two thirds reported having been bullied by a colleague, one third by a superior. Members and leaders of the congregation, persons elected to positions of trust and employees had acted as bullies, too. Altogether 65 % of the surveyed reported, that more than one person had bullied them.

Female workers of the parishes took the role of an active bully more often than men, as opposite to the results of other surveys. Frequency and forms of psychological violence were linked to the profession and gender of the surveyed as well as to the place of living, size of the congregation, at the time one had been working there and the size of the family.

Failures in interaction between people as well as serious problems with working conditions led into psychosomatic symptoms such as stress and burn-out, which were recognised by the workers, too. Ninety one per cent of the female and eighty-seven percent of the male employees of the parishes said they had recognised symptoms of stress during the previous month when the survey was carried out. Forty eight per cent of the workers felt overly exhausted weekly after a day at work and 15 % of the surveyed felt they were burnt out.

The Consequences of psychological violence

The consequences of psychological violence are exceptionally serious for the victims. Many of those who have suffered in their lonely hell for years because of psychological violence, have

ended up committing suicide or retiring early because of their incapacity to work after developing serious psychological symptoms. Problems of mental health have become the main reason for early retirement due to the incapacity to work. The more the employees feel that they have become victims of harassment, molestation and bullying at work, the less they feel they can participate in decision making concerning their work and parish and the less independent they feel in their work.

Psychological violence robs a victim the feeling of coping with life. Apart from this, psychological violence is connected with overall atmosphere at work as well as with the relationships between the employees. The more shut the atmosphere is and the poorer the team spirit of a parish, the more competition and jealousy there is at work and the more openly disagreement and quarrelling take place among the personnel, the bigger the risk of becoming a victim of psychological violence and bullying will be for an individual employee.

Bullying is connected with formation of groups and cliques. The more there are different groups and cliques in a parish, the more the workers are isolated from each other and the more they hide their problems, the more common bullying will be. On the other hand, the more people are encouraged to express their own opinions, the more openly information is shared and the more there is openness, constructive cooperation between the workers, the smaller will be the likelihood, that an individual worker will end up as a victim of bullying and harassment.

The fact, that psychological violence is closely connected with stress and burn-out experiences of the workers makes bullying at work and psychological violence especially alarming from the point of view of the parishes. An exhausted employee does not have the strength needed to defend one's rights against discrimination after managing daily routines at work. The cycle leading to incapacity to work is ready. The more stress and exhaustion are experienced by the employees at work, the more often they will need occupational health services and medical leaves. The expenses caused by bullying at work totaled 85 000 euros a day according to a study by the Ministry of Labour of Finland in 1997.

Usually a victim blames him or herself for what has happened. One wants to be loyal to one's parish. Even if everyone in the parish was aware of what has happened, violence is usually not reported to outsiders. Members want to keep up the myth of spotlessness, infallibility and being always right.

Breaking the cycle of violence

It pays for both the employer and the employee to prevent burning out of work. However, it is difficult to reduce exhaustion and psychological violence in reality due to the collective nature of the phenomena. Silence, indifference and lack of hope are problems of the whole parish, not only of one religious leader or his or her subordinates. A congregation develops one's own culture and identity, which are taught to new employees. Newcomers are taught to mind what one is allowed to do and what should not even be tried out.

Separation from other religions is typical of any religion. Many people consider that their own way of expressing faith is the only right way that leads to the paradise and is given by God. In such cases behavior is seen as a question of life and death. Setting boundaries means there will always be some sort of violence. Cultural rules of a religion are considered holy, and they are protected. When controversies arise, we tend to try to find something to blame instead of ourselves. Evil is found in other people and phenomena, in scapegoats either inside or outside the community. Members of a community can then direct at scapegoats their own feelings of threat and fear that have not been dealt with. Those who cross the boundaries are treated as if they were evil. Those, who defeat the evil, are seen as heroes. By that time violence can become the only factor connecting the members of a community. Those who try to stop violence are seen as a threat and they can be ridiculed or there can be attempts made to isolate them from the community.

This is why it seems we are lacking ways of reducing violence. There are some ways, though. I have myself used narrative therapy and social drama in addition to sharing information when training employees in different parishes. These methods can be used in some cases along with occupational counseling to help resolve situations that have caused deadlocks in working conditions. It is good to figure out the strengths and risks of the person trained and community behind him or her in order to find out a realistic aim. In such cases it is good to question the means a community uses to reach its goals. As a result of training participants can identify with each other's reality. Instead of defeating one's fear of differences by using external control and violence, one's ability to feel empathy can be used to come to terms with a situation that causes fear.

In the end it is us who can initiate ending violence. Valuing differences in others is a precondition for absence of violence. Every one of us has the power to refrain from violence. It is up to us to decide.

¹ Translated from Finnish to English by Sanna Vainikainen

