WOMEN’S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

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AND
PREPARED IN CONJUNCTION WITH
DOMINICAN SISTERS INTERNATIONAL
AND
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION
OF JUSTICE AND PEACE
2003
We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Sister Thoma Joana Swanson for the art in this book. Sister Thoma was asked to do this work at the last minute so we want to say a special thank you to her for sharing her great talent at such short notice. We are eternally grateful to her and delight in the masterpieces she has prepared for all of us!

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet "Women’s Rights are Human Rights," No. 8 in the series, is the fruit of a joint project of the International Dominican Commission for Justice and Peace and Care of Creation and of Dominican Sisters International (DSI). It proposes to continue the contribution to the permanent formation of the Dominican Family that the International Justice and Peace Commission of the Order has been carrying out with these booklets for some years.

The objective of the Booklet is to present facts, actions and/or happenings that through the years have formed women’s history in their difficult and persistent quest for equality. It also seeks to provide tools to enable both men and women to reflect on the challenges that call us to relationships of mutuality in the mission of Jesus, so faithfully followed by Dominic and Catherine.

Based on the outline approved in the Justice and Peace Commission meeting in Rome in 2001 six Dominican sisters, knowledgeable about women’s reality, were asked to work on the different chapters, with the idea of having a meeting where each one would present her work and receive feedback to continue the process through electronic communications. That meeting, a week of intense work, was held in Quito, Ecuador in September 2001.

Sisters from all five continents participated in the project. Petronille Kayiba (Republic of the Congo) and Arlene Flaherty (United States) wrote the first chapter on The Quest for Women’s Equality. Marie-Henry Keane (England) reflected on Liberating Encounters in the Bible while Leonila Bermisa (Philippines) presented an historical overview of Women and the Church. Maritza Trigo (Colombia) and Luisa Campos (Dominican Republic) did chapter four on Women’s Rights are Human Rights. Luisa also coordinated the project in representation of the International Dominican Justice and Peace Commission. The coordinator of CODAL, Joan O’Shanahan (Ireland and Argentina), represented Margaret Ormond of DSI and Mary Ann Connolly (USA and Peru) has been the translator.

To assist the facilitator in the use of the booklet there are some suggestions at the beginning. The questions provided can be used before or after the reading of the chapters which can be studied in one or more sessions according to the possibilities of those who use them. At the end of each chapter are found a prayer/celebration, a glossary and a bibliography. A few appendixes and many references can be found in the web pages of the International Dominican Commission for Justice and Peace and DSI.

We express our thanks to Margaret Ormond who, from the beginning of this project has offered her total moral and financial support, to Joao Xerri for his encouragement; to Antonio Cabreja and the community of Dominican friars and students for their warm and loving welcome in their house in Quito; to Mary Ann Connolly for her precise and repeated translations; to Lourdes and Javier Campos for their long hours of typing and the creation of the cover; to Joselyn Calderón for her noble collaboration in the revision and condensation of this booklet and to so many persons who in one way or other have cooperated in its realization.
En Memoria de Ella

In Memory of Her
"WHY ARE YOU WEEPING?"
July 22, 2003,
Feast of Mary Magdalen, Patroness of the Order

Our dear sisters and brothers,

This booklet is a long time in coming! Though written this past year, it has been on the minds and hearts of our sisters and brothers for at least twenty-five years. In 1977 at the Chapter of Quezon City, Philippines, the friars recognized that 'the emergence of the laity' and the 'liberation of women and the recognition of their equality with men' were the 'two great movements in the Church and the world.' The sisters, reflecting on their experiences of inequality in the Order, Church and World and tapping into their desires for more mutuality, have likewise emphasized the important of addressing this issue.

This booklet has been a collaborative project from the beginning because it was sponsored by two collaborative entities: the International Commission of Justice and Peace is the oldest collaborative commission of the Order because from the eighties, sisters have been part of this group; Dominican Sisters International (DSI) is also a collaborative project among sisters from different congregations of the apostolic life for the sake of our common mission. And for the first time in the history of the Order, there is a woman, named by DSI, who serves as International Co-promoter of Justice and Peace: sr. Marie Therese Perdriault. Furthermore, the authors, coming from all the continents, worked together on this material and shared comments and critiques. And they did this at the formation convent of the friars in Quito, Ecuador, where the friars served the sisters so that they could think and write. As one of the friars said: "We played Martha so that they could be Mary!" Our hope is that this booklet will advance this collaboration. Therefore it needs to be used by all of us, sisters and brothers alike.

We invite you into a spiritual journey as you pray these texts and dialogue about them. We have to give each other time to build trust. As the Master of the Order, fr. Carlos Azpíroz says in his letter on Itinerancy: "This is a true sign of mutual trust. Our future is in the hands of our brothers, of our sisters. The future of our brothers and sisters is in our hands." (#35,36) This booklet is not intended as a tool for mutual accusation of even an examination of conscience. Nor it is about creating guilty consciences.

This booklet is a way of addressing tears: "And when the Lord saw her (widow of Naim), he had compassion on her and said 'Do not weep'. (Luke 7:13) Sharing this compassion of Jesus inevitably leads us into the experiences of weeping women the world over. As Sister Kathy Long, OP reminds us in one of her letters from her US prison: "pray for justice and for all women who weep in anguish from violence in life." This booklet is also a way of rediscovering the first explosion of joy in our faith memory, the joy of our God-given DNA: "At long last, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." (Genesis 2:23) From the beginning we have been called to be equal partners. And as Dominicans we were born as a family. This is our birthright – we can never be wholly fulfilled and at peace until we release this treasure within our Church and World.

Your sister and brother in Catherine and Dominic,

Margaret Ormond, OP
International Coordinator of DSI

Joao Xerri, OP
International Co-Promoter of Justice and Peace
Some Ideas for Facilitators

Activity 1: As you begin facilitating a group gathering on the topic: Women's Rights Are Human Rights, invite the group members to introduce themselves and share their knowledge and experience of this topic.

Suggested Questions

- How have you experienced the struggle for women's equality?
- What are some reasons why women struggle for equality?

For the Facilitator: When the initial conversation above is concluded, continue with this activity.

Activity 2: Please have several participants read to the group

Reader 1: In the year 2000, the United Nations Population Fund reported that one in three women had been physically assaulted or abused in some way, typically by someone she knew, such as her husband or another male member of her family. In response, governments publicly condemned violence against women and committed to show political will and provide financial resources for its eradication, but their performance, in practice, failed miserably to meet women's needs.

Reader 2: There are thousands of people, mainly young children and the chronically ill and elderly, dying each month because of the sanctions, but the fabric of Iraqi society is being destroyed. Women are particularly hard hit. Observers are already seeing a resurgence of early marriages in rural areas. Teenage girls are married off because that makes one less mouth to feed. In some circles, young girls are withdrawn from school in order to help their mothers and because parents have to choose which of their children to send to school. Usually, the boys are chosen. Many women now wear the traditional black cloak (better known by the Iranian name "chador"), and this reflects the continued strong influence of tradition and a certain revival of conservativism. There are many grounds for blaming the embargo against Iraq. The current and unexpected setbacks in Iraqi women's progression towards equality are just one more reason to do so.

Prepared By the Women's Human Rights Resources Reem Bahdi Director, Women's Human Rights Resources Faculty of Law, University of Toronto

Reader 3: In many societies, an important reason given for Female Genital Mutilation is the belief that it reduces a woman's desire for sex, therefore reducing the chance of sex outside marriage. The ability of unmutilated women to be faithful through their own choice is doubted. In many FGM-practicing societies, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a woman to marry if she has not undergone mutilation. In the case of infibulation, a woman is "sewn up" and "opened" only for her husband. Societies that practice infibulation are strongly patriarchal. Preventing women from indulging in
"illegitimate" sex and protecting them from unwilling sexual relations, are vital because the honor of the whole family is seen to be dependent on it. Infibulation does not, however, provide a guarantee against "illegitimate" sex, as a woman can be "opened" and "closed" again. In some cultures, enhancement of the man's sexual pleasure is a reason cited for mutilation.

**Reader 4:** The trafficking of women for prostitution and related forms of sex entertainment...is anchored into two foundations: the traditional view of gender inequality which instrumentalizes women's bodies for sexual and reproductive use; and the more liberal view which redefines certain forms of sexual exploitation such as prostitution as work, This legitimates the selling of sexual "services" as commerce, and reconstructs the female body as commodity. The "invisible hand" of the gendered market further assures that male consumption is optimized in the buying and selling of women's bodies. Researchers differ on the numbers of women trafficked internationally. United Nations reports estimate that 4 million women have been trafficked. The United States reports cite 700,000 to 2 million women and children internationally trafficked each year into the sex industry for labor. Taken from "The Neglected Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking in the United States" by Patricia Hynes and Janice G. Raymond in Policing The National Body: Sex, Race and Criminalization by Jael Sillman and Anannya Bhattacharjee Cambridge Mass: South End Press, 2002

**Suggested Questions for further discussion after each chapter:**

- What further insights, questions or concerns do you have about the situation of women, globally, after reflecting on these readings?
- Why are human rights for women so difficult to achieve?
- What can you really do locally to promote and achieve human rights for women
CHAPTER I

THE QUEST FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY

“UNLESS THE GRAIN OF WHEAT DIE”
WOMEN OF EL SALVADOR
At the opening of the 21st century technological, scientific and medical advances have dramatically improved our capacity to communicate, understand, and heal. However, almost half the world’s population lives in poverty. There are many reasons for the scandal of global poverty. Many people live under corrupt governments or suffer the effects of unfair policies established by international lending agencies. The promise of widespread prosperity promoted by the proponents of globalization has not materialized. Many nations are engaged in armed conflict and many nations lack natural resources. However, if these problems were resolved, even with technological, scientific and economic advances, until women’s equality is realized globally, poverty and suffering will continue to grow.

Seven hundred million of the 1.2 billion people living in absolute poverty are women. One-third of the world’s poorest households are headed by women. Everywhere, elderly women account for the most single person households and they face the greatest economic hardship of all. Two-thirds of the world’s illiterates are women. Worldwide AIDS infection rates are now higher for women than men. Twenty to fifty percent of all women have experienced violence from a so-called “loved one.”

Since 2000, an estimated 60,000 girls are considered “missing” in China and India because of sex-selective abortions, female infanticide, and neglect. In this same period, more than 5,000 girls were murdered by their parents or other family members because they spoke to boys on the street or “dishonored” the family by becoming a rape victim. Throughout most of the world women earn on average two-thirds to three-fourths as much as men for the same work. Housekeeping, childcare and other activities mainly performed by women are rarely included in economic accounting, although their value is about one-third of the world’s economic production. Advances in well-being, empowerment and equality of women, the achievement of human rights for women are a critical component in sustainable development for our world and for the life of our planet. Therefore, the pursuit of women’s equality is everyone’s “quest.”

A. Exploring the Causes for Inequality

Advancing equality for women involves transforming systems, structures, cultures, mindsets, beliefs and practices that create and sustain discrimination against women. Understanding patriarchy and how it functions is essential to transforming this formidable obstacle to women’s equality.
Patriarchy

Before patriarchy, i.e. "father-rule" became the globally institutionalized system of male dominance, women’s role and function in reproducing life, growing food, and creating utensils as well as her knowledge of plants, roots, herbs and medicines gave her great significance in the process of developing society. Historians, examining this pre-patriarchal era contend that,

Although they seemed more active in the domestic sphere, women were physically as capable of hunting as their male counterparts. What appears to be evidence of early sexual division of labor was really a strategy for survival. Men hunted because women could bear children. Childbearing women were probably considered too great a risk for group survival should they perish in a hunt.

It is likely that the early practice of the “exchange of women” is one of the significant causes of the subordination of women in history. Historians believe that because of their capacity for and vulnerability in childbirth, women were prized and taken as seized property during warfare. The theft of women led to constant intertribal warfare from which a warrior culture emerged. In the process of this historical development, women became thought of as possessions, as things to be “owned” while men became the “owners” because they conquered and protected. “Women’s reproductive capacity,” according to historian Gerda Lerner, “is first recognized as a tribal resource, then as ruling elites developed, it is acquired as the property of a particular kin group.” The patriarchal practice of exploiting women’s capacity for reproduction has advanced to exploiting other means of production. Increasing surplus and gaining and protecting economic advantage through violence are all developments of patriarchal practice.

Although patriarchy can be understood as a structure for organizing society, patriarchy is also a mindset, a worldview, and a way of looking at life based on: a) androcentrism, a way of thinking and acting that takes the characteristics of ruling men to be normative, b) hierarchy, a way of centralizing power at the top of its pyramid structure and placing others in series of subordinate graded positions reaching down to the least powerful at the largest base, c) dualism, the dividing reality into separate and opposing divisions while ascribing value to them. The effects of patriarchy are overwhelmingly destructive to women, other marginalized groups and to the earth. The destructive momentum of patriarchy must be halted and this system of domination ended, if human rights and women’s rights as well as the survival of our planet are to be achieved.

Women and Self Esteem

One of the most-serious and pervasive by-products of a patriarchal, androcentric (male-focused) culture is self-doubt, and even self-hatred, among females. People who are excluded and marginalized deduce that they have little to contribute to others. At times, they hate themselves. Institutions and individuals reinforce these misconceptions when they do not stop the traditions that isolate power of all sorts to a few people.
Correcting the imbalance is a life-long endeavor. It requires personal attentiveness and collective power.

Like other oppressed groups, many women internalize the images and messages about them coming from patriarchal, androcentric systems and culture. The internalization of these messages can lead to a continuum of effects ranging from low self-esteem and self-depreciating behaviors, to serious depression and suicide. Helping women to recover healthy self-esteem is complicated by androcentric bias in theories of human development. Feminist psychologists, however, have been making significant progress in addressing this bias while furthering the understanding of the development of a woman's sense of self and the pervasive problem of low self-esteem and depression in women. According to modern psychological development as found in the work of Eric Ericson, human development requires that in early life, the human being successfully achieve the task of separating themselves from others in order to become an autonomous, healthy individual. The theory holds that because the girl child shares gender with the caregiver, she is never totally able to achieve this separation or the desired selfhood that is critical to a healthy self. Feminist psychologists are challenging these biased assumptions about the separation task saying that it places less value on the experiences of the girl-child for whom experiencing self-in-relation enables her to experience herself as being differentiated, having agency, and self-worth in and through relationships. The dominant model of autonomy and separation, held up as the paradigm for human development functions in the overall scheme of patriarchy which values and rewards individualism and autonomy. For most women, however, this paradigm does not work. Furthermore, when the dominant system shaping society and culture does not support or value the relational perspective and qualities of women, women’s participation in shaping society is thwarted. Repeated experiences of this frustration negatively impact a woman’s self-concept and self-esteem. In the work of recovering a healthy sense of self and agency in shaping one’s life and world, women must utilize the power of self-in-relation. Accessing support of other women who share common experiences as well as participation in collective efforts to change patriarchal systems, structures, policies and cultures, is a critical component to women’s health, well-being and equality in society.

Concepts of Gender and Sex

Sex refers to biological identity, the possession of male or female sexual organs and the proportionate activity of male or female hormones, which grounds the distinctive roles of men and women in the reproductive process. Gender, however, refers to the experience of self and others in terms of sexual identity. Although sex and gender normally coincide in humans, i.e., females experience themselves and are experienced by others as feminine and males as masculine, this is not always the case or always totally dichotomous. Thus, someone who is biologically a male might experience himself as feminine and might be experienced that way by others. And persons are sometimes experienced as both feminine and masculine, or androgynous. The point is that while sex is biologically determined by observation of empirically available data, gender refers to the way one experiences oneself or others.
The sphere of sex and gender is replete with many complex issues. As our understanding of human sexuality grows, so too does our understanding of the complex dimensions of how the human person develops a sexual and gender identity. Notwithstanding these complexities and the continuum of gender identity, for women, gender plays a crucial role in the struggle for equality and human rights. For women, gender involves prescribed social roles stereotyping and discrimination. In most countries girls and boys are raised to take on very different roles and behaviors. Diverse values and attitudes to male and female children reinforce behaviors based on cultural ideas of gender norms. This brings with it a whole set of expectations about behavior and character that determine the opportunities a child will be allowed in different cultures. Although gender socialization affects both girls and boys, it particularly discriminates against girls. The preparatory committee for the 2001 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the Children’s World Summit stated in their review of the state of the world’s children that,

By reason of gender alone, girls were commonly disadvantaged. Although girls shared improvement in health and education, data and field investigations confirmed that girls remained one of the most disadvantaged of social categories. Girls were less likely to attend and achieve at school. They were also less likely to have equal access to food and health care. They were more likely to be subject to intensive labor within and outside households. They were also more likely to experience sexual exploitation and abuse. Girls in poor rural and remote regions were especially disadvantaged in education, health and occupation. Girls were often excluded from development agendas.  

Patriarchal dualisms continue to shape our understanding of gender. Ascribing roles and stereotyping on the basis of gender has limited women’s access to opportunities. Furthermore, gender role stereotyping has ascribed lesser value to women’s contribution and this has led to unfair wage and labor policies adversely affecting women and their dependants. Since the 1980’s the United Nations has been using the analytical screen of gender to evaluate the effect of its programs. Despite these efforts, however, the gap between men and women is widening in many parts of the world. The eradication of gender discrimination involves attending to how and where gender plays a role in the minimizing or discrimination of women. All arenas of life: religion, culture, education, economy, policy and media, must be scrutinized for gender stereotyping and discrimination. Unless the institutions, which shape thinking, culture, beliefs and policy, are transformed, gender discrimination and injustice for women will continue.

B. The Historical Pursuit for Equality

It is almost impossible to trace the origin of women’s struggle for equality. For centuries, under the hegemony of patriarchy, most women were denied access to the skills and tools essential to recording their history. What women thought, how they acted, believed, ritualized, resisted and contributed to societal development was not recorded. The fact that women did pursue equality throughout history is
recorded in misogynist accusations about their efforts. Cato, for instance said of the Roman women, “It is complete liberty, or rather complete license they desire. If they win in this, what will they not attempt? The moment they begin to be your equals, they will be your superiors.”1 Western women’s history is but one part of the global story of women’s pursuit of equality. However, it shares the problem of documentation and discontinuity endemic to women’s history, globally. The work of recovering and recording women’s history must be pursued with diligence. It must also recognize the limits as well as the particularities of culture, race, class, nationality, and sexual identity in women’s experience.

The Origin of Feminism

Although equality has been a focus of the women’s rights movement, the solution to the problem of global suffering and injustice is not “add women and stir.” In other words, giving women equality in a patriarchal system is not the solution to the problem. Equality for women is not enough. Transformation of patriarchy for the betterment of all is the focus of the contemporary women’s struggle. Feminism is a movement and social theory, which is focused on the empowerment of women for the transformation of social and religious systems beyond patriarchy. “This movement is concerned not simply with the social, political, and economic equality of women with men but with a fundamental re-imagination of the whole of humanity in relation to the whole of reality, including nonhuman creation.”12

Traditionally, the 19th Century is associated with the origin of the feminist movement. Recently, however, feminist historians are making an important distinction between the history of feminist consciousness and the rise of the 19th Century women’s political rights (suffrage) movement. By defining feminist consciousness as

the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural but is societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternate vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination,13

feminist historians show that feminist resistance to patriarchy and oppositional thought developed over many centuries and in many regions of the world. This history must be recovered to the extent possible as the work of developing feminist consciousness continues.

As a consciousness ever growing, feminism has not been immune to the pitfalls of racism, ethnocentrism, classism or heterosexism. Feminists are learning that “the study of differences among women, sometimes referred to as heterogeneity, is a laboratory in which women can learn how to think about and live with ‘human differences’ themselves.”14 This learning is a critical contribution to the deconstruction of patriarchal dualisms, which falsely construct such notions as “other.” “Other-ness” permits violence and injustice to continue in our world. The flourishing of the just society is what energizes and directs feminism. In describing this vision one feminist writes,
Imagine living in a world where there is no dominance, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility. (Feminism) alone will not create such a world; we need to end racism, class elitism, imperialism. But it will make it possible for us to be fully self-actualized females and males able to create beloved community, to live together, realizing our dreams of freedom and justice, living the truth that we are all 'created equal'.

Global Recognition of Women’s Struggle

Since the signing of its founding Charter over fifty years ago, the United Nations has focused its efforts on ensuring women’s rights, globally. In 1975 the UN observed the International Women’s year by holding the first world conference on women in Mexico City. Since then three other conferences were held: 1980, Copenhagen, 1985, Nairobi and 1995, Beijing China. All four of these major world conferences have made significant contributions to the progress of women. The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, (Beijing Conference, 1995), established one of the most comprehensive strategies for governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations, (Ngo’s) and the private sector to use in removing obstacles to the advancement of women called the Platform for Action.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identifies 12 Critical Areas of Concern considered to represent the major obstacles to women’s advancement. The success of the platform requires a commitment on all government and non-governmental institutions to its implementation. Every group and institution committed to women’s rights should use the platform to focus and evaluate its work.

In addition to the Beijing Platform for Action, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty binding those states that ratify it, to policies and practices, which uphold women’s rights, protection and equality. To date, 170 countries have ratified the treaty. Twenty countries, among which is the United States have not ratified the convention. Global ratification of this treaty which holds countries accountable for implementing policies and strategies to advance women’s status is a key element in the achievement of women’s rights on a global scale.

International Women’s Day

Around the world, International Women’s Day is celebrated on March 8. The designation of this day as “women’s day” provides a context for women to come together to celebrate the history of their struggle for rights and equality and to assess their present status, future vision and plans for advancement. In many countries March 8th is considered a national holiday. In others, it is as little as a footnote in the day’s news, and still in some, it receives little or no observance. It is important that women everywhere mark this day in a way that affirms, nurtures and energizes their struggle.
International Day of Non-Violence Against Women

Violence against women is a deadly global epidemic. Women die daily from acts of violence against them. In *The State of the World's Population, 2000*, the extent of the problem is documented,

> Around the world at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some other way most often by someone she knows including by her husband or another male family member. In the United States, a woman is battered, usually by her intimate partner, every 15 seconds.16

The extent to which women globally are victims of violence, torture and homicide, goes largely unrecognized. Women, fearful of repercussions and with lack of alternatives for support, often bear brutal treatment silently. This global scandal must be eradicated. Many nations are taking important steps in this direction. One important step is developing awareness of what is often a “hidden epidemic” and adopting policies and programs at the national level to prevent, intervene when women are abused as well as provide women with the means to live a violence free life. November 25 was established by the UN’s General Assembly in 1999, as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This date had been observed in Latin America since the first Feminist Encuentro for Latin America and the Caribbean held in Bogotá, Colombia, July 18-21, 1981. Originally chosen as the day to commemorate the lives of the Mirabal sisters from the Dominican Republic who were violently assassinated during the Trujillo dictatorship, November 25th is now the day when the global community recommits to end all violence against women.

Summary

The Quest for women’s equality and human rights can be achieved. It will require that individuals, households, communities, institutions and nations denounce the longstanding mindsets, beliefs and practices that create and sustain male privilege and women’s subordination. Everyone must commit to actualizing the vision of right-relationships, mutuality, equality among women and men. The achievement of women’s rights and equality is the benchmark for global justice, peace and development. The quest is in process. Steps are being taken. There are many to go. Let us continue.
As we go marching, marching, unnumbered women dead
Go crying through our singing their ancient call for bread.
Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew.
Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we fight for roses too.

As we go marching, marching, we bring the greater days;
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.
No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil where one reposes,
But a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses, bread and roses.

Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes;
Hearts starve as well as bodies; bread and roses, bread and roses.

"Bread and Roses" written by James Oppenheim to honor striking
garment workers, 1912.
Prayer/Celebration

Eve's Daughters

Leader: In the book of Genesis there is a brief notation—the only written indication that Adam and Eve gave birth to daughters. While the biblical text refers only to Adam, we may appropriately speak of Eve’s daughters.

Reader: A reading from the book of Genesis. When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness and named him Seth. After he had become the father of Seth, Adam lived for eight hundred years and he had other sons and daughters. Gn 5:3-4.

Voice 1: Did Adam and Eve have any daughters?
Voice 2: They must have. Indeed, or we would not be here.
Voice 1: Is it recorded anywhere in the Bible that Adam and Eve had daughters?
Voice 2: Hardly anyone remembers the notation in Genesis 5, but surely that will change.
Leader: The surprise surrounding the discovery of daughters should also be accompanied by sorrow, for from the very beginning, women have been forgotten or valued solely for their role in propagating the species. An injustice has been done to all Eve’s daughter’s biological and spiritual. Those in the present can best be supported by spending a little time rediscovering their sisters in the past. Who and how many were Eve’s daughters?

For shared reflection and conversation:

1. Have you ever thought about Eve’s daughters? Have you ever heard anyone speak of them? How do you feel about the silence and indifference surrounding our firstborn sisters?
2. What are some of the things Eve would have told her daughters? How would she have explained her action in the Garden? What would she have said about losing paradise in the process of becoming fully human?
3. If you are a woman, you are one of Eve’s daughters. What are some of the characteristics you have inherited from the mother of all the living?
4. Whatever Eve herself may have felt, her sons were given priority over her daughters in every arena of life and opportunity. Has that been true of your experience in family life or in society?
A Psalm for Eve’s Daughters

All: The first females
To break the waters
Of Eve and earth
Were Eve’s daughters.
Tell their story. Sing their praises.
Give thanks for the hope their memory raises.

Voice 1: In the beginning,
On that day,
In the annals of in illo tempore,
Women emerged from the primal waters
Of one woman’s womb,
Eve’s daughters.

Voice 2: In the dreamtime
When life began
God made woman
And God made man.
“In our image” yes, I will send her
Replicas of our female gender.

All: Daughters danced
In the new creation,
Learned about love
And dedication,
Opened their wombs and brought to birth
Goodness and strength
To people the earth.

Voice 1: But no one remembered
what had been
when the daughters of Eve
ushered life in.
We lost their laughter,
Lost their tears,
Lost their memory to the years.

Voice 2: Look to the stars
And see there reflected
The dreams of the daughters
As yet undetected
Flickers of hope,
A flash of their flame,
And there in the stars
You will read their name.

Voice 1: Feel the wind on your fingers and face
And hear in its whisper
The delicate trace
Of the song of the daughters,
The primeval theme
Of the fullness of life
In the time of the dream.

Voice 2: See in the moonlight,
The warmth of their faces
And feel in the waters
Their sensuous traces
The lace of the spider
Has strands of their hair
There are signs of the daughters of Eve
Everywhere.

Voice 1: In the fields and forests,
Among the flowers,
Where they lifted their spirits
And sharpened their powers,
They dreamed of a future
Where women would be
Just as happy as they were
And yes, just as free.

All: All who are female
Have passed through the waters
Of life, all women
Are Eve's daughters.
Look to the future and dare to believe
We'll recover the spirits of the daughters of Eve.

Taken from Eve's Daughters in WomanWitness: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter Women of the Hebrew Scriptures: Part Two, by Miriam Therese Winter
Bibliography

The following bibliography of works not cited in full in the text is provided especially for those interested in further reading on feminism, and social justice.


**Glossary guide to the Quest for Women’s Equality**

**FEMINISM**
is a movement and social theory, which is focused on the empowerment of women for the transformation of social and religious systems beyond patriarchy. This movement is concerned not simply with the social, political, and economic equality of women with men but with a fundamental re-imagination of the whole of humanity in relation to the whole of reality, including nonhuman creation.

**GENDER**
refers to the experience of self and others in terms of sexual identity. Although sex and gender normally coincide in humans, i.e., females experience themselves and are experienced by others as feminine and males as masculine, this is not always the case or always totally dichotomous. Thus, someone who is biologically a male might experience himself as feminine and might be experienced that way by others. And persons are sometimes experienced as both feminine and masculine, or androgynous.

**GLOBALIZATION**
a process of rapid economic integration among countries driven by the liberalization of trade, investment and capital flows as well as rapid technological change.

**PATRIARCHY**
(“father-rule”) the globally institutionalized system of male dominance. Although patriarchy can be understood as a structure for organizing society, patriarchy is also a mindset, a worldview, and a way of looking at life based on: a) *androcentrism*, a way of thinking and acting that takes the characteristics of ruling men to be normative, b) *hierarchy*, a way of centralizing power at the top of its pyramid structure and placing others in series of subordinate graded positions reaching down to the least powerful at the largest base, c) *dualism*, the dividing reality into separate and opposing divisions while ascribing value to them. The effects of patriarchy are overwhelmingly destructive to women, other marginalized groups and to the earth. Patriarchy, though favoring men, is not a worldview or practice exclusive to men. Women can and do think and act from a patriarchal perspective.

**SEX**
refers to biological identity, the possession of male or female sexual organs and the proportionate activity of male or female hormones, which grounds the distinctive roles of men and women in the reproductive process.
PART II

AFRICAN WOMAN AND CHILD
Investigation of the Causes of Inequality in Africa

Kayiba Petronille, O.P.

In many African societies a change is occurring. In the past ten years there has been an explosion of the presence of women in civil society, and since then their entrance in public life is evident. Many think that in the near future this change could transform all aspects of life in Africa, including politics.¹

Nonetheless, the Africans have become unquestionable experts in the art of organizing within and without their frontiers.² We can note very promising innovations thanks to their action, such as women's progressive access to positions of responsibility and decision-making, although this does not occur without some of them paying a high price. Conscious of their condition, they participate more and more actively in international spheres which try to promote equality between the sexes and they are actively committed to the multiple activities of the development NGO's concerned with women's issues.³

After the Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in September, 1995, and largely thanks to the pressure by African women, many countries have revised their constitutions, incorporating gender equality. But it must be recognized also that in spite of the efforts that African women are making, there still exists a great difference between the legislation and its actual application. Professor Ngoma Binda exactly describes this reality when she says:

It is undeniable today that there exist great inequalities against women, numerous and from now on intolerable for the moral conscience. (....) On the other hand, there is still a very strong resistance on the part of men and masculinists to everything concerning the right of women to equality, to dignity, to be treated completely as a person.⁴

A. The Causes of Inequality in Africa

Research into the causes of inequality between men and women in Africa is a very complicated question which requires study in many areas, among which we can mention: the education of the girl child by her mother or her family, the initiation rites of adolescents, the carrying out by women of the social tasks proper to them in marriage, maternity, the third age, death. To these elements must be added the influence of the western concept of the human person transmitted by colonization, the mass media and the present structures for the exercise of political and economic power, without forgetting the great influence of religions, both Christian and oriental that flood the black continent.

The complexity of the factors that influence the field investigation on the inequality between men and women marks the limits of this modest presentation which does not pretend to be exhaustive.

In Africa and more specifically in the Democratic Republic of the Congo the concepts of gender and sex are not necessarily places from which to discover the causes of inequality between men and women. In effect, in African languages, at least in black Africa, there is a total absence of gender. Words and names are not preceded by feminine or masculine articles. The same thing occurs with personal pronouns. They are not masculine or feminine. This means that language does not convey discrimination between feminine and masculine. The fact that gender cannot be conveyed by language assures that it's
impossible, except in the consciousness of the speaker, to assimilate the male to the feminine, or the feminine to the male. For example: the personal pronouns, "he," "she" cannot be assimilated in a masculine plural form, because these forms do not exist. [Translator's note: this possibility does not exist in English either since the plural form does not indicate gender as it does in romance languages] Before a group of persons composed of women and men the women are not assimilated to the men saying "they [masc.] are." One says: "wako" in kiswahili (various countries of east Africa), "badl" in Tshiluba (Democratic Rep. Of the Congo), "eneoso" in kimbundu (Angola). The prefixes "wal," "ba" and "ene" include fundamentally both feminine and masculine without any distinction or exclusion. 5

With regard to language that we call "sexist" it is equally difficult to find it as it exists in western literature. For example, in the Congo the words man and woman do not necessarily mean a person of feminine or masculine sex. It happens that in our languages the sister of my father is called "father-woman", and in certain tribes the brother of my mother is called "mother-man." In our languages, to say that this one or that one has a mother's heart does not imply anything negative.

All this comes to say that purely on the level of language it is extremely difficult to establish inequality based on the principle of the oppression exercised by the strong (male) on the weak (female).

Nonetheless, it's not impossible to hear in Africa those who discriminate against women, underlining their weakness (lack of physical resistance) and their incapacity to construct a town. In this sense we can find in the language a discriminatory component that has repercussions in social functions. And on the contrary, it must be recognized that it is difficult to affirm that in Africa the women are not capable of work that requires a great physical effort or great intelligence for their planning. In the history of Africa we know of women soldiers (the Amazons of Dahomey, the present Benin), women bankers (in the kingdom of the Congo) and women who have carried out social-political and religious revolutions. They are considered great prophets. 6

On the level of government, it's worth pointing out that in certain societies of pre-colonial Africa women occupied a place in the political organization. They were elected, invested and they reigned with the same right and title as the men. They followed the same norms as the men. 7 In other tribes, the king's mother was assimilated to the men, 8 exempted from the prohibitions related to women, as for example the construction of a house and the consumption of certain food products.

From all of the above, we can conclude that the inequality between men and women in Africa is found above all in daily behaviors. Clearly said, there does not exist a direct relationship between the way of speaking and concrete actions. This lack of consistency between what is said and what is lived is accompanied by a kind of social hypocrisy that generates a group of behaviors which we can qualify as discriminatory toward women. This affirmation leads us to say that even while there is in Africa an equilibrium between patriarchy and matriarchy 9, polygamy and polyandry, we need to expose an asymmetry of oppression in which women are, after all, victims.
B. Historical Investigation of Inequality

In Africa the historical research into the causes of inequality between men and women can begin in the traditional African initiation rites and the anthropology that they contain. The negative effects of this anthropology mark the bodies of women as truncated realities. They become submissive to practices which consist purely and simply in preparing their bodies for the pleasure of men, a preparation which includes the mutilation of their organs (the practice of the excision or circumcision of women) and which reduces them to the condition of objects of the male. These realities show a notorious injustice toward women. While the male is never bound so as to assure his fidelity, the woman is considered incapable of maintaining fidelity, and therefore incapable of administering her sexuality.

In certain marriage ceremonies and in funerals, women are devalued, subjected to the oppression of the male, an oppression officially recognized and sanctioned as good. Among the Baluba of Kasai (D.R. of Congo), for example, when her spouse dies the woman cannot in any way participate in the decisions concerning the funeral of her deceased husband. And for as long as the wake lasts, which might be for a whole week, the widow must submit herself to truly degrading services and humiliations.

Another historical origin of the lack of equality between women and men in Africa is in the colonization and its assimilative, dualistic anthropology. Modern African society is marked and modeled by occidental civilization, principally by means of education, science, developed technology, urbanization and salaried work. This situation has further complicated the situation of the African woman. She finds herself even more subjected, in certain areas of life, to the unjust status of subordination and marginalization. Torn between the desire for change and the practices and customs which subjugate her, the African woman bears at the present time all kinds of violence: physical, psychological, cultural, sexual, political, economical, familial, religious, etc. The many women’s liberation movements that abound on the continent are a witness to this.

In this context it should be recognized that the present African situation allows a pertinent analysis of gender and sex, to the degree in which Africa, because of globalization, is continually influenced by western mental and cultural structures. It is possible now to note that certain couples, individual persons or investigators (men and women) make the effort to revalue the anthropology of women, parting from traditional African structures enriched by the Declaration of Human Rights. It is ever more evident that the rights of women are considered human rights, at least in theory. This indicates the existence of a process of explicit recognition of the struggle of women for women and of the struggle for women on the part of men. This allows us to affirm that there is a perspective of inclusion. However, at the level of practice, the way must still be made.

International Women’s Day on March 8

Since a few years ago, the International Women’s Day has become in Africa a moment for women to officially enter into discussions questioning and presenting proposals tending to overcome, if not to fundamentally correct the relationship of oppression which exists in this our continental community. This discourse by women is often based on Christian sources (for countries with a Christian majority) and
encompasses the traditional African vision of life. On the contrary, the Muslim law or "sharia" as it is practiced, for example, in Nigeria constitutes a challenge for the Christians, who see in it a denial of feminine liberty. In effect, the teaching of the Koran gives two perspectives on women: on the one hand, it elevates the Muslim woman, and on the other it clearly assigns her an inferior status (not to go out, to cover her head, etc.). There are also the Hadiths which are the recitation of the acts and words of the Prophet, and which also have the force of law. According to these accounts, the woman was drawn from the rib of the male. Since the rib is not totally straight but rather bent, the woman remains bent and no attempt should be made to straighten her, since she could break like a rib. In any case, we observe an impetus on the part of the Muslim women who have become conscious of their rights and have reclaimed them, producing a rereading of the Koran and its traditions.

The different feminine associations which struggle for the rights of African women are indications of the consciousness on the part of African women of their own condition and that true emancipation comes, first of all, from inside the woman herself. African women are more present today in the struggle for respect for their civil rights and for equality in access to education, and they are mobilized in the fight against violence committed against women. We should note, on the other hand, that all the efforts carried out for the consciousness raising of women about the problems of inequality that exist in society run into difficulties related to social-political conditions (wars, poverty, illnesses...) and to the appearance of new religious movements (sects) which do not favor women's self-esteem.

**Day of the No-Violence against Women**

Simply observing every day events shows that there does not yet exist, in many African countries, a consciousness about violence against women. We can cite as an example of family violations the fact that we easily accept that a woman may be beaten by her conjugal partner within the family or in public, that she be despoiled of all family property and of her children at the death of her spouse, and perhaps thrown out of her house. In summary, women in Africa are still today victims of multiple kinds of violence of all kinds carried out by men as well as by women themselves. They are beaten, molested, subjected to rapes, to sexual harassment. Women are sold like cows. In fact, the dowry that was traditionally a "sacramental sign" of the matrimonial tie has become truly a matter of commerce.

According to some estimates, in Africa a woman works an average of 2490 hours during a year hours compared to 1400 hours for a man. But her work is not valued, she herself being considered as a complement to the male.

The African movements against violence exercised against women have a great responsibility to make their rights count as Human Rights. This is a very important imperative.

**C. The Origin of Feminism in Africa**

We can say that African feminism began in the period of the great African kingdoms with celebrated feminine figures who defied the structures of the tradition that wanted to subjugate women. They have been seen daring to raise their voices with courage and trying to organize society in a different way.
here two examples from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conscious that we can also find others in the continent.

Tshimbale-Banda was the founder of a dynasty of women in the kingdom of Bene-Kalundwe (Kasai) around the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. She was the first chief of a more cosmopolitan village in the Kalundwe area.\textsuperscript{17}

Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita, founder of a national religion, was a twenty year old young woman of the Mukongos. Of aristocratic origin, she appeared in a very confused situation in which various tendencies sought to recover the unity of the Kongo kingdom. A charismatic personality, Dona Beatrice announced the restoration of the kingdom, recurring to peaceful means imposed and nourished by the very God of mercy and goodness. In the political plane, Kimpa Vita was a visionary with a program for the reconstruction of the country. The powers that be were disturbed. She was considered a prophet of doom. The disturber would be condemned to death. In the religious plane, awakening conscience through honoring the values of the ancestral dimension of religion constituted a questioning of the patrimony of the Christian faith. This initiator of a resistance movement in a Christian kingdom, Kimpa Vita was turned over, according to the method of the times (12\textsuperscript{th} to 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries), to the secular arm. She was judged a heretic and burned alive.\textsuperscript{18}

We also think about other legendary women who have remained in the obscure and/or documented memory of African society. They hand on to present day women the task of illuminating the function of these great women and their implication in African society.

We know about the actions of these women during the colonial period. Many studies bring out their resistance during the conquest or during the colonial period:

In west Africa women merchants have fought in Togo, in Ghana, in Nigeria, in Senegal, in the Ivory Coast with diverse renewals of such resolve. They were in general reactions against the creation of taxes, of duties or taxes, the institution of tolls or other economic decisions which they considered insupportable.\textsuperscript{19}

As far as modern African feminism, it began around the independence of our countries before becoming a theological movement. It continued during the period of the dictatorships and it is present now. The responsibility of women at the present time requires a rigorous re-reading, done by the women themselves, of this history of feminism in black Africa, seeking to observe in each period what has been the function and identity of women.

The feminism of women theologians is rooted in that community feminist movement which debates, caught between two fires; that is, that which has been inherited from the traditional African anthropology and that inherited from the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the same way, in order to get out of situations of injustice, this feminism finds its sources in the African tradition made fruitful by the message of Christ and in the discovery of rights, of values and of modern anthropological truths. Thus the situation of women in Africa stimulates research at both the purely theoretical level and the level of experience. This means that the greatest task that faces
African women consists of producing theoretical syntheses and concretizing, through associations and networks, the struggle for the rights of women. Said in other words, there is no lack of research conducted about women, as Sow and Fatou of the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire and the Universite Cheick Anta Diop have shown. They range from the description of the status and role of women, to the demands for development generated by the twenty years of United Nations' debates on women's rights. Nonetheless, rigorous discourse and feminist practice are indispensable for understanding our social-cultural, economic and political contests, and for limiting and dismantling the conditions of inequality among the sexes in Africa.

Conclusion

In contrast to occidental feminism which avails itself of a linguistic register to get to the social basis of feminine discrimination, I have tried to show that in Africa we must begin with a two-fold reality: traditional African anthropology on the one hand and our colonial inheritance on the other.

I have shown that the actual behavior of certain men and of certain women shows the oppression that women in Africa suffer.

I have also shown that the growing awareness that is occurring in Africa still has a long road to go. This requires material support and, above all, a great deal of sensitive creativity to balance the scale. Without this we can speak neither of rights, nor of justice nor of peace nor of humanity: but rather, simply of sin. It is against this sin deposited as sediment in the structures, mental as well as social, and in behaviors that every kind of feminism struggles. It is there that all women can come together for the defense of their rights, which are human rights.

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CHAPTER II

LIBERATING ENCOUNTERS IN THE BIBLE

THE BENT-OVER WOMAN
Liberating Encounters in the Bible

With special reference to

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
Jesus and the Hunched/Stooped Woman
Jesus and Mary Magdalen

Marie-Henry Keane O.P.

For believers of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Bible’s revelatory words and saving deeds give women and men alike access to a world where faith, hope and love underpin all of reality. At best, these words and deeds address our human condition; help us to make sense of life; give meaning to our suffering; enable us to make choices that are life giving for others and ourselves. They offer us a norms-and-values system against which we can gauge the integrity of our way of life. Letty Russell wrote:

The Biblical witness claims to present a truth that will heal us, make us whole; it will free us, not enslave us to what violates our very sense of truth and justice. ¹

The principles of human freedom, equality, autonomy, justice and right-relations between people, rank high in the code of Biblical ethics, yet there persists in the contemporary world, just as it did of old, a culture of injustice and oppression. A wide gap exists between the rhetoric of human rights and the reality. Furthermore, the gap between rhetoric and reality is even wider when it comes to women’s rights, as I shall attempt to show in this paper.

Injustice: a persistent problem.

In spite of the lapse of time the world of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is, in some respects at least, not unlike our own: All over the world women and men are still being unjustly imprisoned for crimes they did not commit. Women and children in particular are often physically, emotionally and psychologically abused and oppressed. The poor are deprived of basics. No matter how hard they work many cannot earn enough to keep body and soul together. The poor do not have access to education, to adequate health services, to clean water and fresh air. They have no leisure time. In the midst of such grave injustice who will set the world’s oppressed free?

Where are the liberators?

The Scriptures leave us in no doubt: God is the great liberator. God hears the cries of the widow and the orphan, of those who “cry out of the depths.” But concern for liberation and justice is not wholly
a Divine prerogative. God anoints women and men through baptism to be “prophets” of liberating justice. Their voices should be heard speaking on behalf of those deprived of basic Human Rights. Furthermore, the victims of injustice themselves, kept in thrall by circumstances over which they have no control, are likewise invited, in spite of the odds stacked up against them, to claim their freedom. Paradoxically, it is often in the midst of pain and tyranny that the oppressed encounter God dwelling within them, enabling them to take control over their own lives in spite of their fragility. In pain they feel the divine/human outstretched helping hand. They encounter the God within, and the compassionate neighbour without. Alice Walker writes:

God is inside you and inside everyone else.
You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it
inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you are not
looking, and don’t know what you are looking for.
Trouble do it for most folks, I think....

If the “liberating encounters” recorded in the Bible are authentic they cannot simply offer an opiate to dull the pain of the anawim. The Theology of the Cross offers us more than temporary relief from oppression and pain. It presents Christ on the Cross as one with whom death does not have the last word. In the experience of suffering and oppression, God paves a way to liberation.

Post-Biblical Feminism and Gender Related Oppression.

Jesus brought good news to the destitute; proclaimed liberty to those kept in thrall; enabled the blind to see, and those ground down to go free (cf. Lk.4:18-19). The fundamental message of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures concerning liberation and human rights is, we are told, constant and universal. But is it?

In the minds of certain contemporary women there are serious questions, not simply about human rights but more particularly about women’s rights. As a consequence of gender related oppression directed against them in today’s society, they believe that there should be separate legal instruments in place for the benefit of women. Gender-based violence, from female genital mutilation, rape, trafficking and prostitution, to traditional practises such as dowry and bride price, cause serious physical and psychological harm, rendering women helpless and hopeless.

...even if women are given legal (de jure) equality, this does not automatically guarantee that they will in reality be treated equally in (de facto) equality.

Post-Biblical feminists like Mary Daly, Carol Christ and Daphne Hampson argue that, as far as women are concerned, not only secular law but also Christianity itself is “irredeemably and inherently patriarchal”. Christianity, they hold, “is centred round the revelatory authority of the Bible, round a text which is androcentric and, far from offering liberation to women, seeks to oppress them.” As a socio-cultural system patriarchy is not only a mind-set, it is also a power system, permitting men to have control over women, children, “slaves”, foreigners, and lesser men. It is suggested that the patriarchy, which is
inherent in the Bible, has the historical-political task of keeping the notion of male superiority alive at the expense of women and their freedom.  

Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Letty Russell, Elza Tamez, Merci Amha Oduyoye and others are able to speak about a feminist critical hermeneutic of liberation without having to jettison the Bible. They do not accept that the Bible is totally androcentric. They believe that it contains some absolute ethical principles and feminist liberating traditions in spite of coming out of a tradition that favors men. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza writes:

feminist critical hermeneutics must test whether and how much some biblical traditions contain emancipatory elements that have transcended their cultural patriarchal contexts and have contributed to the liberation of people, especially women, although these texts and traditions were embodied in a patriarchal culture and preached by a patriarchal church.  

The “emancipatory elements” of the Scriptures can, and indeed often do, address women’s needs. These elements are, moreover, integral to the fundamental Christian ethic even where patriarchy tries to obscure them. We know that the clock cannot be turned back. We acknowledge that the culture in which the saving acts of God took place, as recorded in the Scriptures, was undoubtedly patriarchal. We have to accept that. Nevertheless the theology of mutual relation, promoted by the Christ, sought to abolish the hierarchical dualism endemic in patriarchy: Domination, for whatever reason, has to give way to cooperation and co-creative activity. Reflection on Woman’s experience of life has to find a meaningful place in the Church’s theological reflection. Feminist theologians, Patricia Wilson-Kastner and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki among them, argue that,

reflection on experience - and for them especially women’s experience--is part of the human drive toward transcendence, which links humanity with the divine that is its source and goal. The promise of feminist Christian theology lies, in part at least, in its contribution to the expansion of contemporary theological discussion so that it increasingly reflects the actual diversity of lived human experience.

Woman’s capacity to reflect critically on her own experience enables her, not only to come to terms with her autonomy as a woman, but to see how God is at work in her. That experience, reflected upon through the eyes of faith, though limited, nevertheless contributes significantly to the whole theological endeavour.

**Jesus as Liberator**

Emancipation is a constant and recurring theme throughout the entire Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Jesus unequivocally advocated and, indeed, strenuously promoted human freedom. He recognised women’s longings for autonomy and personal freedom and became their advocate. That vision became dulled throughout the centuries and women’s role as dependants persisted Women had to rely on clerics, on male theologians, or male Biblical scholars to interpret the Scriptures for them. Women, with few exceptions, did not have direct access to such scholarship. Instinctively women knew that Jesus’ Gospel message had been watered down; that it was being seen through male eyes only. A disservice was clearly
being done, not only to women, but to Jesus and the Gospel narrative. Women began to realise that if certain emancipatory elements of the Christian Scriptures referred to them as women then the interpretation had to become their responsibility too. No part of the Scriptures was exclusively theirs, nevertheless certain pericopes needed to be seen through the filter of women’s eyes too. Throughout the centuries women attempted to extricate themselves from the unjust limitations imposed on them by Church and society. Rachel Conrad Wahlberg in her book, Jesus and the Freed Woman, draws attention to mental constructs and images that have consistently demeaned women, limited them and resulted in low expectations for them. “Labels, Limitations and Low Expectations” are, she says, the three L’s which hinder women from enjoying fullness of life. Jesus, in his role as Liberator, intervened in women’s lives.

In this chapter I have chosen to examine the experience of three women in the New Testament whose lives were irrevocably changed for the better by Jesus’ intervention. These are not merely “stories” about three individual women. They are everywoman who has tried to break through barriers, to defy death-bearing customs, to stand up straight, to claim discipleship with the apostles and to preach the gospel unhindered.

**Predicare: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman**

Only John the Evangelist records the experience of the Samaritan woman who went to the well to draw water – a task she must have done often. (Jn 4:1-42). At face value the incident is quite prosaic, quite mundane: a man asks a woman at a well for a drink of water and they carry on a conversation. But as soon as Jesus spoke with her he violated a number of traditional Jewish codes governing the relationship between women and men. He spoke to her in public and that was taboo. Furthermore, as a Jewish male he became ritually unclean through engaging in conversation with a Samaritan woman. Indeed all Samaritan women were regarded as unclean from birth. Jesus was a Rabbi and by disobeying the law laid himself open to further criticism. In taking a drink from an unclean woman (a perpetual menstruant) he put himself on trial. Even the vessel from which he sipped water was unclean, but Jesus appeared to be untroubled by scruples of any kind. He did an unheard of thing – he broke open the Scriptures with the woman and they engaged in theological dialogue! He revealed to an “outsider” a much-guarded secret, namely, that he was the Messiah. (Later, at the raising of Lazarus, another woman, Martha, would confess that Jesus was the Christ, Jn. 11:17-22). Jesus took the Samaritan Woman into his confidence. She heard what Jews for generations had longed to hear: that the Messiah was in their midst. She went back to her village to preach (predicare!) that saving message. As a consequence of her preaching many believed in Jesus, even before they encountered him personally.

Objectively speaking, the Samaritan Woman was in a vulnerable position: She had had a number of husbands and was currently living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus referred to her circumstances but did not pass judgement on her. She belonged to a sect who accepted only the Pentateuch as inspired Scripture; nevertheless she was prepared to engage, without hesitation, in a
religious debate with a prophet (v.20). Was it that she was very brave, or was it that Jesus freed her by his open-mindedness? He said nothing about theological orthodoxy or about her limited knowledge of the Scriptures, a limitation imposed on her by her Samaritan upbringing. Jesus and the woman were a stone's throw from Mt. Gerizim, and the rival Samaritan temple. He did not refer to the long-standing Samaritan-Jewish controversy concerning the relative importance of the sites. She broached the subject. His response to her would have shocked orthodox Jews. Very soon, he said, the question would have no relevance. Major changes were in the air. She was being let into another secret... "an hour is coming... in fact it is already here." (v 23) where the place of worship would be of little consequence.

Towards a Theology of Mutuality and Justice

Carter Heyward's theology of mutuality and justice has, I believe, a great deal to say to the very successful encounter between the Samaritan woman and Jesus. She writes:

...the original and fundamental relatedness of all being is liberated and redeemed in history through the recreation of mutuality and justice

Mutuality in relatedness is an expression of justice and, in the present context, is the antithesis of patriarchy. When Jesus and the Samaritan woman meet for the first time, they engage in mutual dialogue in spite of their gender, cultural and religious differences. The lament of women throughout the centuries, not least among them women of faith, has been that they have not been listened to. They have not been taken seriously, they have been silenced, their opinion has not been valued, and they have been restricted in their proclamation of the gospel. They wanted opportunities for creative dialogue but often met with rigid unbending mindsets. Pained and frustrated they retired to await another day and another opportunity. Carter writes:

Mutuality is sharing power in such a way that each participant in the relationship is called forth more fully into becoming who she is—a whole person, with integrity." 

Sharing power mutually, even between unequals like Jesus and the Samaritan woman, offers possibilities for freedom and not for oppression, for integrity but not for domination, destruction and brokenness. As a man of his times Jesus would have been aware of the means used by religious and secular bodies to ensure the subjugation of women. At best women would have been undervalued, at worst treated as property. If this was the case between women and men in Jewish society, what about the relative position of woman and God? God was all-powerful, "wholly other" and she was lowly and impotent. Traditional Christologies perpetuated the image of Christ, transcendent and untouchable. Women can readily identify with the vulnerable Christ, the humble servant, the man for others. They can supply the drink of water, wipe his face with a towel, and anoint his body for burial. The Samaritan woman fetched and carried water yet Christ's request: "Give me to drink" created a life changing opportunity for her, even before he promised her living water. The evangelist in telling her story does credit both to Jesus and the woman. In daring to cut through laws and customs, which kept women in thrall, he was freeing her to break loose. She took up the challenge. Therein lies her salvation. She, in
turn, became an instrument of liberation for others. She prepared the way for the Christ after the manner of the great prophet John the Baptist.

Jesus’ disciples were disturbed by the turn of events but perhaps they should have realised that Jesus’ gospel, in this instance, was about acting with *self-possessing love* on the one hand, and out of *self-donating love* on the other. There was nothing contrived about his encounter with the Samaritan woman, on the contrary, the immediacy of their mutual connectedness disarmed her and surprised his disciples. Other Gospel women had a similar experience, Mary of Magdala and the haemorrhaging women among them. The result was not to deny Jesus’ divinity but to enable those, and other women, to recognise the image of God in themselves and to free them to be his disciples.

*Laudare!* The Hunched/Stooped Woman is liberated.

The healing of the hunched and infirm woman recorded in Luke’s Gospel (Lk. 13:10-17) takes place on the Sabbath while Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. From the corner of his eye he saw a woman who for eighteen years had been kept captive by “a spirit” (v.11) that enfeebled her. She “was bent double and quite unable to stand upright”. Carol Stuhlmueller writes:

> Here we encounter another of those incidents, exclusive to Luke, in which Jesus’ kindly regard for the unfortunate and for women is attested... He saw her... Jesus always had an eye for the needy. 14

Carter Heyward in her exposition on “Christic Power” refers to the “christological sensibilities” of Jesus. In “the exchange of glances heavy with existence” we see a prime example of what she means, for Jesus did not turn a blind eye to the woman’s condition. Having seen her, “he called her over” (v.12). The evangelist says nothing about an appeal for healing. This is another incident of unsolicited divine intervention, of pure gift, which, to quote Alice Walker again, manifests itself

> ...even if you are not looking, and don’t know what you are looking for. 16

The spiritual and physical freedom, which Jesus was about to give the woman who had been kept in thrall for eighteen years, would take place in the public domain in circumstances that were controversial. His liberating words, the laying on of hands, and the incredible outcome, moved the woman to give glory to God. The synagogue official, on the other hand, responded to the healing with indignation. He tried to incite those present to do the same. Jesus could, undoubtedly, have called the woman to one side and healed her, but had he done so the full impact of her liberation would have been diminished (v16). Jesus debunked the official’s argument that the Sabbath was primarily about abstaining from work. The purpose of Sabbath, according to the pre-Christian book of Jubilees (2:22f), was “the praise of God, the creator of the world and the liberator of the people.” The woman who was “made straight” was ecstatic at her newfound freedom and, in her ecstasy, glorified the God who made this possible. *(Laudare!)* ”All the people” (v.17) took their cue from her and were over come with joy at the wonders of God! She had fully understood the meaning of celebrating the Sabbath while the synagogue official and his supporters
had not. Jesus called them "hypocrites" (v.15) and her, "the daughter of Abraham" (v16). The irony was that she, a mere infirm woman, was theologically and liturgically the superior. They, in fact, were the infirm ones!

Satan had kept the woman in bondage for eighteen years. Jesus speaks of untying her bonds. The bystanders certainly would have known the thirty nine rules laid down in the Mishnah governing the Sabbath: the tying and loosening of knots were among the forbidden works and although Jesus was clearly speaking figuratively, they would still have resented the analogy. He had come to teach, and the lesson he had to transmit was that he was Lord of the Sabbath; and secondly, the Sabbath was made for people and not people for the Sabbath. If an ox and ass could be unloosed on the Sabbath should a daughter of Abraham be denied the same privilege?

For centuries the spirits of women have been restrained in many and various ways with crippling effects on their psyche, their minds and their bodies.

- Women, with children on their backs, have been bent double, working in paddy fields from dawn to dust for a mere pittance.
- Women have bent over sick children to comfort them but could not provide food or medicine to quieten their cries.
- Women, evicted from their poor dwellings, have bent under the burden of transporting their few possessions on their backs.
- Women have bent over to shield themselves against blows directed against them.
- Women have bent double to avoid the gaze, the touch and unwanted attentions of men.

For eighteen, twenty and more years of their lives many women all over the world have been held captive and still are. Jesus' chaste and compassionate glance; his invitation to the stooped woman to come to him; his gentle laying on of hands enabling her to "stand up straight"; his commendation of her as someone who knew how to celebrate the Sabbath in spirit and truth by giving glory to God, freed her and gave her a rightful place in the tradition as the daughter of Abraham. That is the kind of good news that women want to hear.
"WHO ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?"
Benedicere! Jesus and Mary Magdalene

Perhaps it is significant that of the three Gospel women whose liberating experience has been reflected upon in this chapter, Mary Magdalene should come last, for she is the resurrection woman par excellence, a woman who points towards the future. Her personal story is part of a larger narrative: it is about Christian sisterhood. It is about the experience of women who follow Jesus and who learn what it means to be his disciple. In his *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles*, Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome (c170-235) calls Mary of Magdala “the Apostle to the Apostles” (Apostola Apostolorum). In a somewhat imaginative manner he writes

> So that the woman might not appear a liar, but a bringer of the truth,
> Christ appeared to the male apostles and said to them: ‘It is truly I who appeared to this woman, and desire her to go to you as an apostle.’

Mary of Magdala is mentioned by name no less than fourteen times in the Christian Scriptures. Some of these references are repetitive but we can piece her story together by looking at just a few of the texts.

“And many women there were, watching from the distance, the same women who followed Jesus from Galilee and looked after him. Among them Mary of Magdala...” (Matt.27: 55-56)

Mary, like the rest of the women, was on the margins for custom dictated that she should not take centre stage. She ministered faithfully and generously as ecclesial women have done from the beginning, but “at a distance.” Luke takes up Mary’s story from there:

> ...He (Jesus) made his way through towns and villages preaching. With Him went the twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments. Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out... and several others provided for them out of their own resources. (Lk. 8: 1-3).

As they journeyed they received Jesus’ liberating Gospel at first hand. Initially they might have followed him because he had cured them, because they wished to repay Jesus through providing for him and his disciples out of their own pockets. Mary had been delivered from seven demons. Stuhlmueller writes: “such possession indicated only a very serious illness” J. l. McKenzie calls her condition a “psychic disturbance.” Carla Ricci goes right to the heart of the matter when she writes:

> Mary Magdalene, a woman “dispossessed of herself” came back from Jesus as a woman restored to herself, to the depths of her own being. And rather than one central moment, there was a process, a developing relationship of discovery and growth.

Just as Yahweh prepared the prophets to deal with “infirmities” like fear or cowardice, so Jesus brings Mary to greater wholeness by allowing her to accompany him, by healing her, by restoring her to herself and gradually building her up. She was being groomed to be an apostle. Yet history has maligned her by unjustly identifying her with the sinful woman of Luke 7:36ff. Mary repeatedly heads the list of women who followed Jesus, yet there is no record of her healing. There is no suggestion that by being in Jesus’
company Mary might earn the title disciple. Certain rabbis would have had serious doubts about a woman's capacity to study or teach the Torah. In the Palestinian Talmud, for example, we read: "The words of the Torah will be destroyed in the fire sooner than be taught to women." 24 Jesus was preparing Mary Magdalene and the other women to be his acknowledged disciples 25 He was tutoring them to that end, even while they ministered to him.

John 19:25 continues the story: Mary, Jesus' Mother, Mary wife of Cleopas and Mary of Magdala followed Jesus to Calvary and stood at the foot of the cross. Carla Ricci writes:

If one considers the tendency not to register the presence of women except in exceptional circumstances,....why do all three Synoptics note the presence of women at the passion and...give the information that these women had followed Jesus from Galilee? 26

The texts themselves give the answer: his male disciples had "all deserted him and fled" (Mk 14:50). Mary Magdalene and the other women were providing a testimony to their fidelity when it was most needed. They were prepared to accompany him to his death while manifesting the same stalwart constancy, which is one of their recognised qualities.

John 20:1,11,16,18 records the climax of the encounter of Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the resurrection story. In the garden the Good Shepherd, who knew his sheep by name called: "Mary". She recognised his voice and responded:"Rabbouni" 27 (Benedicere!) Having found Him, he insists that she must liberate him by letting him go. She was now the bearer of the Good News. In a society where a woman's witness was of no juridical value, the Apostle to the Apostles found that she is not believed when she triumphantly announced: "He is risen," Paul the Apostle would later record that Jesus appeared "first to Peter," then to the twelve, to 500 brothers, to James and "last of all to me," Paul (1Cor 15:5-8). But there is no mention of Mary Magdalene! If this teaches us anything it must be that

The church has never been good at listening to women's truth. Women are often ignored, not taken seriously or dismissed out of hand.

Women have been "the text the exegetes forgot". For a church that has such a long history it can forget (like Paul the Apostle) that women, and Mary Magdalene in particular, had a central part to play in the Gospel story.

Mary of Magdala sat (at a distance) listening to the liberating words of Jesus. As never before, women need to study and to teach theology so that the prejudice against the "woman's perspective" can be debunked. Her contribution to the theological endeavour, though limited is nevertheless significant.

Women's Rights include, because God ordained it so, that as followers of the Resurrected Christ, they should be able to exercise their role as apostles in freedom and with responsibility without restraints based primarily on their gender.
In Conclusion: Laudare, Benedictere, Praedicare.

I would like to end on a hopeful note. I believe that, as far as women are concerned, the emancipatory elements of the Scripture are integral and not merely incidental; that the theology of mutual relation promoted by Christ, will eventually succeed in abolishing the hierarchical dualism endemic in patriarchy; that domination in church and state based on gender bias must give way to co-operation and co-creative activity; that women's experience, because it contributes so significantly to the expansion of contemporary theological discussion, should increasingly reflect the diversity of lived human experience; that Jesus himself strenuously and unequivocally promoted the liberation of women; that Jesus tutored women to be his acknowledged disciples. The good news of salvation and liberation, as recorded in the New Testament is marked by two high points: by the voice of Mary saying "yes" to an angel and the voice of Mary saying "He is risen" to the world. For those voices and for all our faithful foremothers in faith we praise, bless, and make known to the world the God who sent Jesus the Liberator of the world!

Prayer/Celebration

The Hunched-Stooped Woman

Read the passage (Lk 13:10-17)
As the text is read aloud, accompany the reader with rhythmic CLAPPING. (by one or more women).

First: there is the slow and laboured clapping of the stooped woman labouring to walk into the synagogue.

Second: Change the rhythm of the clap when Jesus sees the woman (anxious)

Third: The woman comes to Jesus. Her heart begins to beat faster. Change tempo of clapping.
(Excitement, anticipation.)

Fourth: After cure. Joyful claps. (Everyone)

Points for Shared Reflection:

1. In what ways are women crippled by the burdens they must bear?
2. Do you agree with Jesus that people take priority over religious regulations? Has the church of your experience resembled Jesus in this regard?
A Psalm for the Heavily Burdened

1. Look upon me, have mercy on me,  
   O Source of my liberation,  
   For I am heavily burdened.

2. The cares I carry are weighing me down.  
   I am losing all perspective.  
   my eyes no longer see the stars  
   In this never-ending night.

1. I am crippled by fear and anxiety  
   when I think of the world  
   we are handing on  
   to succeeding generations:

2. bombs that may blow us all to bits,  
   polluted streams and rivers,  
   wizards, fads and charlatans  
   in place of sacred shrines.

1. I am crippled by institutional rules  
   and insensitive regulations,  
   burdened by expectations,  
   by wishes that won’t come true.

2. I am crippled by gender bondage  
   and the yoke this lays upon me  
   and all women of the world,  
   and I fear the rage  
   that rises in me  
   when my sisters  
   are denied.

All Bend down to me and lift me up  
   to face myself with courage,  
   to look the demonic straight in the eye  
   and resist it with a song.

   Teach me to care and not to care  
   bid my fear  
   be still,  
   and let all my insecurity  
   lost itself  
   in Your will.

Psalm and questions taken from WomanWord: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter by Miriam Therese Winter pp. 75-79
1. Russell, Letty. (ed) Feminist Interpretation of the Bible. p.43
2. Walker, Alice. The Color Purple. p.177
3. Discrimination Against Women: the Convention and the Committee. Fact sheet no 22 UN Publication. p.4
4. Ibid. p.11
5. Wandra, Ellen. K. Humanity has been a Holy Thing: Towards a Contemporary Feminist Christology. p.13
6. The complexities of this debate are worth pursuing but space does not permit that here.
7. Schussler Fiorenza, Elizabeth, In Memory of Her. p.33
8. Cf. Elizabeth, Schussler Fiorenza., p.27
9. Wahlberg Rachel Conrad, Jesus and the Freed Woman, p.1
See also Keane. Marie-Henry, Towards an Authentic and Transforming Spirituality for Women in South Africa. In Women Hold up Half the Sky. pp.185-197
11. Brown, Raymond (editor) et al., Cf. The Jerome Bible Commentary. pp. 432-433 (Sec.63:77)
13. Heyward, Carter. Touching Our Strength, p.190
15. Quoted by Wondra, op cit., pp. 272-273
16. See ref. 1. p.2
20. Guillaume P.M. Ste. Marie-Madeleine. col.565
21. Schmueller. op. cit. p.138
23. Ricci, op. cit. p.138
24. Sotah, 19a
25. Grundmann W. Evangelium, 174; Str-B1 1046f
27. Ibid. cf. p143.

Glossary

BENEDICERE: To bless.

PRAEDICARE: To preach.

ANAWIN: The poor of Yahweh.

LAUDARE: To praise.

MISHNAH: A collection of binding concepts which form the basis of the Talmud/oral law of the Jews
Bibliography


CHAPTER III

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

CATHERINE CONVINCES POPE GREGORY XI TO RETURN TO ROME FROM AVIGNON
Women and the Church

Leonila V. Bermisa, MM

Never tiptoe again into your Church. You are at home...(Mbuyi Beya Bernadette)

A. Introduction

Jesus envisioned for his followers communities of faith where women and men are regarded with equal dignity and respect. Women like Mary and Martha (John 11), Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and John, Salome, Joanna, Susana and many others (Mk. 15:40-41; Lk. 8:1-3) were part of Jesus' circle of friends and supporters. In Early Christianity, women like Prisca, Mary, Junia, Phoebe, and the other women were house-church leaders, deacons, preachers and teachers (Rom.16.1-15). This was remarkable at that time considering that patriarchy has been firmly established in the culture and society. A vision of equality in a world of inequality is a legacy left by Jesus to his women and men disciples. The earliest Christians sought to live an inclusive community of shared discipleship. It is therefore just and right that Christian women of our day seek their rightful place in the Church, and claim it once again as "home," a space where authentic love is experienced, where faith and hopes are shared, and where harmonious and just relationships prevail.

In this chapter I will attempt to give a glimpse at how women gave witness to their faith, proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus, and asserted their rights as Christians and as members of the Church over the centuries. The first section is a brief overview of women’s story in relation to the Church, that the second section presents the lives of specific women who in their respective socio-cultural and religious milieu valiantly proclaimed their faith and asserted their rights in a patriarchal and androcentric Church. These are Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Rose of Lima, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, Edith Stein and Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke. They are exemplars of ‘contemplatives in action’ and, thus, most relevant to the Dominicans for whom this project is being done.

It is my hope that the lives of our faith-filled fore sisters will inspire and encourage women and men in the Church today to enter into the mind and heart of Jesus and make his dreams come true. It is my hope that we would continue to seek the justice that Jesus sought and with his fire transform the face of the earth.

B. Overview of Women and the Church from Early Christianity to Post Modern Times

Unlike the original egalitarian and charismatic community environment modeled in the life of Jesus and practiced at the beginning of Christianity, the early Church, as shown in the later Pauline writings, so-called Pastoral Epistles, has become repressive and discriminatory against women.
Let woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over man, she is to keep silent. (1Tim2:11-12)

The emphasis was clearly on institutionalizing the Church that favored men. Leadership and decision-making were monopolized by men. The women who were leaders of house-churches and co-workers with men in proclaiming the Gospel during Christian antiquity now would become prisoners in their own homes, and excluded from the official handing on of Christianity.¹

The emergence of Gnosticism in the 2nd century brought in opportunities and possibilities for women as this afforded them the freedom and autonomy that was fast slipping away from the social reality including Church reality. Its openness to both feminine and masculine spirits and a feminine and masculine aspect of divinity was especially attractive to women.² It became a great rival of and a threat to the infant Church and was eventually declared a heresy by its authorities. Like Irenaeus, Tertullian condemned the Gnostics and called Gnostic women heretical, bold, and immodest because they presumed to prophesy, teach, exorcize and baptize.³ During this period in history, Christians were also being persecuted by the Romans. Among the many martyrs were women like Blandina, Perpetua and Felicitas, who took control of their lives and stood up and died for their belief in Christ.

During this period of persecution of Christians in the 3rd century, misogyny in the Church became more pronounced resulting in the exclusion of women from ecclesiastical positions. The women deacons became known as deaconesses to indicate that they were only to serve women, and their position became more of a restrictive measure than an affirmation of the rightful place of women in the Church. The deaconesses, widows and virgins who were living ascetic lives were eventually grouped together and were assumed into the monastic movements of the 4th century as a further means of control by the Church.⁴

Research shows that by the 4th and 5th centuries women were clearly marginalized and deliberately silenced, making them anonymous in history. The unjust treatment of women became worse throughout the years as male dominance became more and more ingrained in the laws and policies of the Church. These patriarchal and misogynist attitudes found their way into the formal structure and system of the Church that became clericalized, ⁵ a shift that coincided with the devaluation of women and human sexuality. Mary Malone, a historian, claims that clerical reform is rooted in the absolute separation of clerics and women. As clerical reform progressed, particularly in the first part of the 2nd millennium, the accompanying negative theorizing about women's lives attains at times the level of demonization.⁶ Reforms that were anti-women and anti-lay were enacted and were reinforced by Canon Law and conciliar decrees.

The teachings of the Early Church Fathers such as Augustine and the Doctors of the Church of the Middle Ages such as Thomas Aquinas became influential factors in shaping and conditioning the attitudes and mind-sets of the people particularly the secular and church authorities. This led to the systematic and methodical exclusion of women.

According to Rosemary Ruether, Augustine is the classical source of the patriarchal anthropology that
denies woman’s participation in the image of God. He claimed that the male alone is made in the image of God, while woman become an image of God only when she is joined to a man.

...Unless forsooth according to that which I have said already, when I was treating of the nature of the human mind, that the woman, together with her own husband, is the image of God, so that the whole substance may be one image, but when she is referred to separately in her quality as a helpmeet, which regards the woman alone, then she is not the image of God, but as regards the male alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him alone. *De Trinitate 7.7.10*

He also contributed to the degradation of woman and sexuality. He said: "I know nothing which brings the manly mind down from the height more than a woman's caresses and that joining of bodies without which one cannot have a wife..." The influence of Augustine's teaching had a negative effect not only on women but on married couples who must now put their sexuality at the service of procreation. Any pleasure derived from sexual relationship even in marriage, was considered sinful, a burden for the men and women of the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the years after.

Thomas Aquinas endorsed Aristotle's description of woman as a "misbegotten male." According to this belief, women are not only inferior to men in the natural order but are also the cause of men's downfall and must therefore be placed under control lest they infect the higher aspirations of men. Women must be distanced from the holy including the clergy because their female bodiliness is seen as polluting and defiling the sacred, a belief based on the misconception surrounding menstruation.

One event that rocked the Church and that affected a major shift from the Church of the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, was the Reformation embodied in the person of Martin Luther in 16th century Europe. This led to a counter-reformation that was actually more a refusal to reform in the Catholic Church in the West.

The Reformation brought a revaluation of sexuality. Married couples were released from the psychological and moral hang-ups associated with the sexual act. Women who wanted freedom from ecclesiastical dominance now had other options besides entering the convent and being forced to live a cloistered life-style. Refreshing as this may have been, this movement that resulted in some re-structuring of religion and society did not change the subordinate status of women. Much of society remained patriarchal in structure.

... the social structures remained utterly patriarchal. Of Luther's important thoughts about the brotherliness and sisterliness, the friendship, of men and women in Christ, all that was in fact left was the duty to marry. Despite all the new possibilities of activity for women, nothing changed in their role of being subordinate to men. The hierarchical structure of obedience (man-woman, parents-children, master-servants) was preserved...The wife remained economically, legally and politically dependent on her husband...12

There were influential women, however, whom historians believe had greatly influenced the outcome of the reform as it spread through their respective nations. For instance, Anne Boleyn, with her Protestant
inclination, was one of the key figures in King Henry VIII’s circle, advocating reform in England. A highly educated woman, Margaret Roper is another figure, as was the controversial figure, Elizabeth Barton. A similar development had taken place in Europe with the rise of communities of women like the Quakers.

Now one could see and hear women teaching, preaching, celebrating the liturgy and engaging in mission. Many had joined the newer communities like the Quakers (the most significant of them was Margaret Fell, the mother of 'Quakerism').

As women continued to be attracted to religious life, the Roman Catholic Church wanted to exert more and more control. Thus virgins and widows, who wanted to live a monastic life where they could have autonomy and access to education, were subjected to ecclesiastical control and censorship.

The new religious communities of women which came into being in the spirit of Dominic and Francis (sometimes at the request of women themselves and mostly by papal decree) were finally put under the corresponding male orders to integrate them into the established forms of Church religious life. Other communities of 'virgins and widows dedicated to God', living in the world, which first formed in the Netherlands for religious and economic reasons and worked for a living in craft and charitable activity, were even declared heretical. ... 15

In spite of the constraints and discrimination inflicted by the Church, women continued to enter or found convents and monasteries where they had space to express their piety, exercise political freedom, acquire basic knowledge in reading and writing, and study the doctrines. Thus, today we find the famous writings of Hildegard of Bingen, and of course Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila whose lives we will look at later in this paper. Convents became also the nobility's welfare institutions for the unwanted daughters and widows. In fact, convents in the early middle ages were mostly for the aristocracy. It was difficult for the women from the middle and lower classes to enter the convents.

The interest in mysticism brought new opportunities for women. Especially welcoming to women was the Cistercian convent of Helfta that became an important center for mysticism. This was presided over for forty years by the Abbess Gertrude of Hackeborn. Mysticism as practiced by women was under the lens of suspicion by the Church that intensified with the emergence of the infamous Inquisition. Women’s writings were constantly suspected because women were believed to be more prone to heresy due to their weak intellect and emotionality. The most tragic of all was the persecution and eventually burning at the stake in 1310 of Marguerite Porete, the author of the famous book, Mirror of Simple Souls, and of Joan of Arc, another mystic, in 1431.

Greatly affecting women during this period was the "witch-craze" that could be traced back to the 2nd century but went into full scale campaign in the 16th and 17th centuries to rid of these alleged women heretics believed to be in league with the devil. The promulgation in 1532 of the Carolina as the new Roman Procedural Law provided a legal basis for the trials of alleged witches. The Inquisition was carried out completely by the state with the pope's endorsement and encouragement.

The witch-craze found its way in colonized countries in Asia where religious practices and rituals were
often led and performed by women. For example, the *babaylan* (priestesses) in the Philippines were demonized and prohibited from performing their religious functions by Christian missionaries who accompanied the Spanish colonizers during the 16th century. Zeus Salazar, a Filipino anthropologist, claims that the *babaylanes* were the first objects of conversion for the Spanish priests who came in the 16th century. The converts became *beatas*—women who lived lives of chastity, prayer and penance, or women who faithfully practiced their religious devotions and offered their services in the Church. Those who did not accede were often accused of idolatry and were named *bruhas* (witches). This experience in the Philippines parallels what happened in other colonized nations in Asia during the period of colonization, from 16th to 19th century.

What finally ended the witch-craze was the Age of Enlightenment. During this period, the human being was declared as "lords of themselves and lords of nature" and the secular world took over the rein that was previously held by the clergy and the nobility. This period marked the launching of the industrial revolution. The increase of knowledge and the discovery of new skills did not necessarily change the status of women. Even the early Romantic movement did not attempt to change the status of women.

... how firmly cemented the traditional understanding of roles was is shown by the fact that even the intellectual philosophical or literary elite hardly made any difference here... For Kant, woman above all embodies 'the beautiful', while man embodies 'the exalted'—'laborious learning or painful brooding' would 'weaken the charm by which they (women) exert their great power on the other sex'... Friedrich Schiller—here hardly differing from Goethe—assigned the woman once and for all a role in the silent inner room of the 'home', sending the man out alone 'into hostile life'. At any rate women could get themselves something of a modern education from the magazines and newspapers which were appearing at this time, and at the theatre.

The great political revolutions that overthrew kings and kingdoms while asserting the rights of the masses to govern was exclusive of women who remained second class citizens, unable to speak out politically and unable to vote. Even when the monarch was dethroned, the dominant male remained king in his house.

the legal dependence of the woman on the man, father or husband, was maintained, and women were only indirectly granted rights.... Thus on the whole, women had to wait until the end of the First World War to be given the vote in the leading industrial countries - the main demand of the early women's movement...

The age of discovery ushered in an age of exploitation and individual pursuits. Free enterprise turned out to benefit more those who had the power and resources, giving rise to capitalism. In this environment, women became a commodity as they were seen merely as instruments of production. Any progress that can be seen for women took place only to a limited degree among the middle classes. It was no different in the Church. The following sums up the Catholic Church's stance.

Thus, tied to the natural law doctrine of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the popes of the following period down to Pius XII still saw women exclusively in terms of her 'natural disposition' as a mother,
which now bound her to family and home. They could not perceive the thoroughgoing disadvantage, often oppression, suffered by women as a result of the pre-eminence of men which was the challenge of modernity. 22

A more open discussion on the equality of women and men took place after World War II and continued into the 60s and 70s. This helped to open the door for a new articulation of reality by women in both the social-political sphere and biblical-theological-spiritual sphere. The liberation method in theology or simply referred to as liberation theology that sprouted from Latin America's experience and reflection of poverty and oppression, gave the necessary tool for feminist articulation. Women have begun questioning and critiquing theologies developed by men. Women have begun naming and articulating their realities and experiences of the divine, thus becoming the rightful subjects of their own theology and re-claiming their rightful place in the Christian story.

Despite this development, the exclusion of and negative attitudes about women continue to be reflected in the Church's leadership, theology and spirituality. Thus, inspired by the valiant women of yesterday, Christian women of today in the continents of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Europe continue to seek truth and justice. They do this by asserting their rights and seeking transformation in the Church and in all aspects of society: economic, political, social, religious and ecological.23 Bearing the realities of women in their respective societies and Churches, women have been involved in dialogues in recent years in order to establish solidarity in pursuing a common goal: the well being of all human and ecological communities, and the liberation of all people from various forms of degradation, deprivation, exploitation, oppression and all forms of violence including those within the Church.

C. Valiant Church Women over the Centuries Revisited

In the midst and in spite of a history of silencing, exclusion and violence against women, there have been ingenious, creative and holy women in the continents of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas who have graced the Christian Story. These are valiant women with astonishing survival skills. They are women who dared to seek the truth, and to proclaim at great personal risk, the truth of the Gospel of Jesus, the gospel of love and peace, even unto death. While many remain unnamed and whose contributions remain unrecognized, there are a few who have been proclaimed saints, doctors of the church, martyrs, etc., such as those who will be highlighted in the next section.

We will look at these women in light of the socio-political as well as religious environment in which they lived. I will attempt a brief portrayal of their respective role and/or influence in Church and society and their contribution to the promotion of just relationships. They will be presented chronologically.
Catherine of Siena (1347-1380).

Before she was declared by the Church in 1970 as a "Doctor of the Church", Catherine of Siena was classified as a virgin. Later, she would be known as a social mystic, a contemplative in action.

Born in 1347 in the city of Siena to a well-to-do family, Caterina di Giacomo di Benincasa was the 23rd of 25 children. Her social and political environment consisted of family feuds, class conflicts and revolutions. As a child, she frequently visited the Church and cloister of San Domenico, a center of Dominican learning and preaching, located up the hill from where her family lived. At an early age, Catherine already did things that were not typical of a girl or a woman in her culture at that time. At seven, she made a vow of virginity. Her youthful vow of virginity is read by many as a sign of heroic sanctity and dedication to God's work, while others interpret it as a way of avoiding the traditional choices offered to women of her time in order to pursue a spiritual vocation as a laywoman. At fifteen, she cut her hair in defiance of her parents' wishes to marry her off for which she was punished by being treated as a servant. At eighteen she received the Dominican habit and began to live a cloistered life in her room.

It was during this time that she learned to read. And then at twenty-one, after experiencing "mystical espousal with Christ" she came out of her seclusion and began her social work by serving the sick and the poor with her sisters in the Mantellate, a group of lay women affiliated with the Order of St. Dominic.

Catherine lived in a century rich in western mysticism. Mysticism as practiced by Christian women and men meant prayer, spirituality and special communication with God. Although women mystics were subjected to more scrutiny and control by the Church, mystics were generally treated with some degree of respect and regard. This afforded Catherine the freedom to continue her quest for truth and space to articulate her faith and experiences of God. Her spirituality attracted men and women from various levels of society and religious traditions. They sought her teachings and spiritual guidance and she began teaching what she knew from experience of the ways of God. With them, she formed wonderful spiritual friendships and established bonds of mystical love. The new social involvement she had with people who sought her out was mutually beneficial because it was through these interactions that Catherine learned subtleties of theological argument and biblical interpretation. Her theological formation can also be attributed to her contacts with theologians who became her followers, and confessors, the preaching of friars, and reading aloud of books and devotional materials, as was practiced, at her home.

Catherine developed her theology in the context of her quest for self-knowledge. She speaks of self knowledge and knowledge of God as one and this knowledge is what impels someone to reach out to her or his neighbor. She explains in her "Dialogue":

Imagine a circle traced on the ground, and in its center a tree sprouting with a shoot grafted into its side....The circle in which this tree's root, the soul's love, must grow is true knowledge of herself, knowledge that is joined to me, who like the circle have neither beginning nor end....This knowledge of yourself, and of me within yourself, is grounded in the soil of true humility... But if your knowledge of yourself is isolated from me there would be no full circle at all. Instead,
there would be a beginning in self-knowledge but apart from me it would end in confusion. And every fruit produced by this tree is seasoned with discernment, and this unites them all, as I have told. (D. 10)

The virtue should prove itself in response to need... I want a few words but many works... I have told you that penance is neither virtuous nor meritorious in itself... But the merit of penance rests completely in the power of charity enlightened by true discernment... I have already told you clearly that virtue cannot be perfect or bear fruit except by means of your neighbors. (D. 11)

The central theme of her works is love of God for humankind manifested in the Christ crucified:

So you see, I have made you my ministers, setting you in different positions and in different ranks to exercise the virtue of Charity. For there are Many rooms in my house(Jn.14:2) All I want is love. In loving me you will realize love for your neighbors, and if you love your neighbors you have kept the law.(Mt. 22:37) If you are bound by this love you will do everything you can to be of service wherever you are. (D. 7) ....All that you do for your neighbor will be done with discernment and loving charity. For discernment and charity are engrafted together and planted in the soil of that true humility which is born of self-knowledge. (D. 8) 30

Fire is a powerful image to Catherine. According to her, being created in God's image, we too have the nature of fire and we are true to that nature when we love. The fire of love is what gives light, warmth, and healing. 30

Her works reveal her depth and skill as a writer. The "Dialogue" is Catherine’s crowning glory, which she simply called “my book,” and which she bequeathed to her followers and entrusted it to her friend and confessor Raymond of Capua, a Dominican friar who later became a Master of the Order.

I ask, you also-you and brother Bartolomeo and Brother ....and the maestro......to take in hand the book and any of my writings that you find. Together with master ...do with them what you see would be most for the honor of God. I found some recreation in them. 31

Her other works are a collection of nearly four hundred letters, and a series of prayers. Her hundreds of letters were addressed to various classes of people: her mother, brothers and sisters, popes, cardinals, monarch, king, queen, princes, governors, priests, nuns, pious laity, mercenaries, prisoners, prostitutes, widows. These 400 some letters reveal her personality and sociability. They show her delight in the uniqueness of each person, her delicate sensitivity and good common sense as she deals with the different temperaments, needs and situations of each. 32

Catherine's mysticism did not preclude her from the social tensions mounting in Siena and other parts of Italy. Her loyalty to the Church and belief that it is an honor to shed blood to win unbelievers brought her to the point of preaching the crusade. Catherine became famous for her work in public charity as well as in high level politics in the service of the Church especially the papacy. At the age of 27, she made her first journey to Florence. This journey started her life as mediator between the papacy and city-states. It was in this journey that she met Raymond Capua with whom she established a tender friendship. She was

55
greatly involved in mediation at every level in the Church at a time when the papacy was in disarray and
the Church reeked with corruption,

... papal centralization and legalization culminated in a cultural
fiscalism, almost unimaginable today, which knew no bounds: an
unparalleled exploitation of the whole Church and thus also a
dangerous alienation of the papacy from many countries. The Roman
papacy - previously the leading religious and moral power - became
the first financial power of Europe, which mercilessly enforced its
spiritually-based secular demands by every means: papal executors,
excommunication and the interdict. 33

Catherine continued her mission for peace and reconciliation, dealing with popes, cardinals,
mercenaries, monarchs, princes, governors, priests, etc. Her greatest concerns at the time were the
crusades, the reform of the clergy, and the return of the papacy to Rome. The decision of the new Pope
Clement V (1309) to settle in Avignon making it the central place of administration of the papacy for 72
years spelled the death of the Papal rule over the Roman Empire. When Gregory XI became Pope,
Catherine persuaded him to leave Avignon and return to Rome to reform the clergy and restore papal
administration there. The succession into power of Pope Urban VI brought more political tension and
conflict. This was the Church that Catherine loved and the papacy that she compassionately critiqued and
tirelessly worked hard to re-direct and restore to its ideal as she understood and believed.

Until the latter part of her life she was engaged in high-level negotiations and dialogue with the Roman
Republic on behalf of the papacy. Some claim that she died seeing her final objective accomplished, and
that her last political work, which she accomplished practically from her death-bed, was the reconciliation
of Pope Urban VI with the Roman Republic in 1380. Others claim that she died broken hearted as she
found herself blamed for the schism, that many believed would not have happened had the pope remained
in Avignon. 34

Her involvements reflect a Catherine who was both a leader and an activist, a woman with immense
self-confidence. Her letters reveal a woman who had "full social consciousness, political involvement,
and institutional criticism." Weaver, a feminist theologian, makes this observation:

... in some ways limited by the cultural and ecclesiastical boundaries of
her own time and one should not look to her for structural analysis and
criticism of either Church or society. But she did manage to find space
for herself as an independent woman, where she operated, for the most
part, above suspicion and with the clear support of the Dominican
friars. 35

Catherine of Siena, a mystic, a teacher and a prophet in both the ecclesiastical and secular world ruled
by men is definitely a role model for church women today. A contemplative in action, Catherine did not
join an existing religious order. Instead she claimed for herself a third-order of laywoman. She is a Doctor
of the Church representing laywomen, just as Teresa of Avila, the next figure to be discussed, is a Doctor
of the Church representing the nuns.
Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Like Catherine of Siena, Teresa born in Avila, Spain was a great mystic in the Catholic tradition. She was declared Doctor of the Church in 1970, and her writings that were under suspicion by the Inquisition during her lifetime, are now recognized as theologically profound. It is important to remember that Teresa was writing at a time when the impact of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) was just beginning to be felt throughout the Christian world. There was some over-zealousness on the part of state authorities to enforce the teachings of the Council. The Church and the Inquisition became the great enforcers of orthodoxy and ecclesiastical law. During this time, Jews were discriminated against. In fact, Teresa's paternal grandfather, a Jew, was forced into Christianity by the Inquisition. Teresa grew up during this period of Inquisition and the burning of heretics. The Spanish Inquisition was a source of fear and oppression particularly among spiritual writers and theologians. Yet Teresa dared to assert herself and pursued her quest for God. Says Kathleen Medwick,

She inspired criticism for her brashness and admiration for her single-mindedness...as far as Teresa is concerned, everything she did was for the glory of God

She brings into the faith a wealth of experience in the spiritual life that she drew from in formulating spiritual exercises for her disciples. One biographer puts it thus:

St. Teresa's position among writers on mystical theology is unique. In all her writings on this subject she deals with her personal experiences, which a deep insight and analytical gifts enabled her to explain clearly. The Thomistic substratum may be traced to the influence of her confessors and directors, many of whom belonged to the Dominican Order....and there is no vestige in her writings of any influence of the Aeropagite, the Patristic, or the Scholastic Mystical schools, as represented among others, by the German Dominican Mystics. She is intensely personal, her system going exactly as far as her experiences, but not a step further.

Teresa's life and spirituality is captured in her books: The Interior Castle, The Way of Perfection, and autobiography simply referred to as the VIDA. She wrote in her native tongue which was Spanish. This was another cause for consternation in the Church because all spiritual and theological writings were expected to be written in Latin. The genius of her writing is that the poor, uneducated nuns who had very little to no formation as well as the educated ones, both inside and outside the convent, could read her books and be equally inspired.

The Spanish culture had an impact on Teresa's spiritual development. Born into a culture that made a virtue of self punishment, Teresa, early in her life, practiced flagellation as did others who aspired for holiness. She would later refer to these self-inflicted pains as her "sufferings" which she said were not enough to repay God's gifts to her. The honra that was highly regarded by the Spanish culture was also a strong theme in her development. Teresa naturally embraced it but to her, honra was not reputation as understood by her society. Rather, honra to her was based on her relationship with God.

The book of a Franciscan mystic and spiritual writer, Francisco de Osuna, entitled El Tercer
Abecedario (The Third Spiritual Alphabet), was influential in Teresa's spiritual development. It became her manual in spirituality. The following lines struck her:

The fisherman, intent on the little float on his line to notice when fish bites, worries about his business, thinking only of fish he has already caught or is about to catch. I do not think that one can find God, regardless of the road he follows, unless he has this determination and anxious concern. It is not the road that matters, only that we single-mindedly set out for God.

All her life, Teresa was focused on doing the will of God, and she did this with much intensity and determination. She knew that her temperament did not fit the life of a typical Castillan woman who was supposed to crave enclosure, a private and protected space. She was someone who loved the world, practical and a realist by nature. She is said to have stated, "Everything that had to do with God gave me tremendous pleasure; but the things of the world captivated me..." While she admitted her strengths and courage, Teresa, throughout her VIDA, belittles herself as a mujercilla, a worthless little woman.

Just the thought that I am a woman is enough to make my wings fall off? How much worse, the thought that I am a wicked woman.

To her amazement, the worse she behaved, the better God seemed to like her. In her VIDA she wrote:

You (God) punished me with the most subtle and painful punishment, since You knew very well what would hurt me the most: You punished my sins with great favors.

Did she really see herself that way or was she spoon-feeding a palatable version of herself to the Inquisitors, and even to her confessors and friends? Teresa lived at a time when women who seemed spiritually independent and self-confident could be viewed as potentially heretical, and thus aroused suspicion among the Inquisitors. Her visions had already been interpreted as hysteria by some so she needed to be careful lest she be charged of having illusions sent expressly by the devil who seek women in particular for his prey. Teresa sought men confessors—Jesuits, Dominicans and Carmelites—whom she believed were intelligent and able to understand her. At that time only men could get education that allegedly enabled them to distinguish truths from lies. Those who understood her tried to direct her. Those who were frightened by her ecstasies or unconventional experiences in prayer tried to change her course. However, this turned out to be difficult not because Teresa was disobedeying them but because, as she often pointed out, God was directing her as well. Once, she wrote to Gracian, one of her friends, "God deliver me from ancient confessors." Besides, Teresa had her own ways of practicing obedience. Medwick comments:

She considers obedience a virtue but in order to follow God's orders, she sometimes found circuitous ways of obeying her superiors.

As she grew in her spirituality, Teresa's friendships and relationships also matured. She was able to integrate her spirituality and her sexuality. She wrote in her VIDA:
Because my soul wasn't strong at all, but very delicate, especially with regard to giving up friendships. I heard these words "Now I (God) want you to speak not with men but with angels." I have never again been able to commit myself to a friendship, or take any comfort in, or feel a special love, except for people who clearly are trying to serve Him.45

Teresa had a deep friendship with Juan de la Cruz (John of the Cross) and Gracian.

In the age of reform and counter-reform, Teresa became a spirited reformer, an exceptional activity for a woman of her time. She was greatly involved in the internal reform of religious communities and monasteries. In those days, the women who joined the religious communities for the most part had no intention of leading monastic life. The custom was to have the young women given in marriage to families in as high a social class as possible. The ones who could not be married off were automatically sent to the convent. There they lived a carefree social life. They wore jewelry and dressed in the latest fashion of the day. Some of these women were well to do. Teresa herself, because of her wealth, had her own room, parlor, and even a private chapel. The poor women who entered became servants in the convent.

Teresa initiated reforms toward more austere lifestyle among those aspiring to religious life. She also tirelessly founded many religious houses for women and men instilling in them her solid spirituality. She sought to reform the clergy as well where abuses were rampant. There were those who were busier in enriching themselves through benefices and real estate and were living like nobles.

Untypical of women of her time, Teresa was a dynamic reformer and innovator, a daring and insubordinate woman as she was described. She was also a political strategist. Mayeski says of her:

In the interest of the Reform, she used every strategy at her disposal and showed her acumen in understanding the use of power. Prayer was central to Teresa's strategy; but she also used the enormous charm that was hers, her "friends in High places," and her understanding of human motivation to achieve her foundations and her reforms.46

She was a woman with uncanny ability to assert and articulate her own unique spirituality, who successfully went through self-discovery and integration process, and who had the willpower to defy narrow cultural and religious norms in pursuit of her own vision. Teresa deserves her title "Doctor of the Church." As some feminist say, she was "Midwife to Woman Church."47
ROSE CARES FOR THE POOR
Rose of Lima (1586-1617)

Isabel Flores y Oliva, later named Rosa (Rose in English) was born in Lima, Peru of a Spanish father and a Peruvian Creole mother. The name Rosa originated during her infancy when her face seemed to have been transformed to a mystical rose.

As expected of a young woman of her time, she was soon informed by her parents that the time for her to enter into marriage had arrived. She refused, however, for even in her youth, she had already made a vow of chastity and focused all her devotion to Jesus and Mary.

As a child she was remarkable for a great reverence, and pronounced love, for all things relating to God. This so took possession of her that thenceforth her life was given up to prayer and mortification. She had an intense devotion to the Infant Jesus and His Blessed Mother, before whose altar she spent hours...Many hours were spent before the Blessed Sacrament, which she received daily. Finally she determined to take a vow of virginity, and inspired by supernatural love, adopted extraordinary means to fulfill it. All this time she had to struggle against the objections of her friends, the ridicule of her family, and the censure of her parents. 48

When her parents relented and agreed for her to remain unmarried she immediately joined the Dominican Tertiary, and eventually received the habit of St. Dominic. She was attracted to the spirituality of Catherine of Siena finding in her the perfect model for herself.

As Rosa grew, her life became more austere in pursuit of greater holiness. All this austerity, so typical at the time for both men and women who were pursuing growth in spirituality and piety, were in effect acts of heroism and great courage which was generally accepted and affirmed by the Church and society. This in a way provided women during Rosa's time some avenue for self development and self determination.

While she lived an austere life, Rosa did not enter the convent or monastery. Instead, she stayed at her parents' home where she nursed sick women, the poor Indians and native Peruvians and slaves as well as poor Spaniards. 49 She financed her works of charity by raising vegetables and flowering plants and doing embroidery and needle work. She paid special visits to the Indians, blacks and mestizos at hospitals and in their houses. She advocated the cause of poor farmers and peasants. At that time, there was much racial and social segregation in her society. Indians, mestizos and blacks were discriminated against, an attitude and practice that Rosa detested and protested against. Guillermo Alvarez y Perca, O.P. explains:

The biographers of Rosa remarked that she had the liking and the custom of visiting the sick and preferably the poor and unfortunate, in their houses and in the hospitals of the Indians, blacks and mestizos. This detail speaks clearly of an authentic attitude of gospel protest, through which Rosa, a Lima Creole, showed her repugnance for the racial segregation which divided men, exalting some and humiliating others. 50

Rosa was pained even more by the discrimination and racism in monasteries and convents.
Mestizos, according to Alvarez were either not accepted or were put out of their communities by their superiors. Alvarez believes that the main reason why Rosa did not pursue becoming a nun was due to racial prejudice in those monasteries. She considered this contrary to the Gospel, and therefore a source of scandal.

The scorn for Indians and mestizos, in the conventual and monastic atmosphere, born of an irrational racism, tormented Rosa terribly. It is very significant that she desisted from becoming a nun at the feet of the Virgin of the Rosary in the Church of St. Dominic. 51

Her refusal to enter the convent was, in effect, a political statement, a personal protest against injustice. Thus, Rosa can be an inspiration to women and men who are aspiring to embody multiculturality and inclusivity in their communities and to all who are seeking just relationships within religious communities and within the Church.

Rosa died at the age of 31, and was canonized saint in 1671. She is often represented wearing a crown of roses for she considers the cross as the way to heaven. For her works of charity, Rosa is considered the originator of social service in Peru. A mystic, a visionary, and a prophet, Rosa is a role model for church women engaged in social transformation.

**Juana Ines de la Cruz (1648-1695)**

Juana, who later became Sor Juana Ines, was an extraordinary woman of her time. Her interests in literature that started during her early childhood days led her to the field of theology. She later became known as the first woman theologian in the Americas. Born to a well to do family in Mexico City, Juana had both the opportunity and the means to pursue her interests and to assert her independence in life, unlike the ordinary women of her day and society.

She was barely seven years old when she attempted entry at the University of Mexico by dressing up as a man since women were not allowed entry at that time. At the age of 15, Juana successfully passed an academic examination about science before forty doctors in the court of the Viceroy Manchera. 52

Juana Ines had an insatiable desire to understand everything around her. She consistently asserted the woman's right to fully participate in scholastic inquiry and to study classical and medieval philosophy. To be a philosopher at that time was unheard of for a woman.

She entered a Carmelite convent at age 16 but stayed only six months and left after an illness. Two years later, she entered the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Hieronymus (St. Jerome), where she became treasurer, archivist, and secretary, and fulfilled a number of other tasks. The Hieronymite nuns were less strict than the Carmelites. Juana was able to pursue her studies and maintain her friendships with writers and scholars, especially with the royalty. She spent most of her time studying and writing. Here was a woman who valued independence and freedom to pursue her God-given gifts, and who, as odd as it may sound today, found a way to be herself by entering the convent. She said of her becoming a nun,
I became a nun because although I knew that that way of life involved much that was repellent to my nature—I refer to its incidental, not its central aspect—nevertheless, given my total lack of desire to be married, it was the least unreasonable and most becoming choice I could make to assure my ardently desired salvation (Panentelli 4-5).

As was mentioned earlier, convents were a safe haven for women because they afforded them relative independence and time and space to pursue education, science and the arts. The alternative would be married life which placed them directly under the control of their husbands. It is worse for the peasant woman, for, in addition, married life also meant a life of drudgery. Life was already difficult for women because of society’s prejudice against them. But perhaps life for women was even harder in 17th century Mexico because of racial issues. During the days of colonization, the indigenous people were systematically subordinated and pacified in order to serve the colonizing nation. The Church, particularly the clergy, was a valuable instrument of the Spanish colonizers. The local clergy became partners of the colonizers in the subjugation and oppression of the indigenous people especially the women. No woman was allowed to differ and contradict the clergy.

It was in this environment that Juana demonstrated her power and level of awareness of the injustices being done and perpetuated systematically. Her most effective weapon was knowledge obtained through education. With knowledge she sought to liberate the subjugated people especially women in her society. She believed that "knowledge was sacred, for it enhanced her woman's ability to reach her God through Scriptures." In her own words she tells us the value of knowledge.

Without Logic, how should I know the general and specific methods by which Holy Scripture is written? Without Physics or Natural Science, understand all the questions that naturally arise concerning the varied natures of those animals offered in sacrifice...? How without knowledge of the order and dimensions, by which History is composed, is one to understand the Historical books? How without command of the two branches of Law, should one understand the Books of Law? Well, then, and without being expert in Music, how might one understand those musical intervals and their perfection’s that occur in a great many passages...? She also regretted the lack of learned women elders and teachers who could serve as mentors to the young women and later pass on to them their knowledge and wisdom. Understandably, she abhorred male teachers influencing and corrupting young girls and women. Oh, how much harm would be avoided in our country if older women were as learned as Laeta and knew how to teach in the way Saint Paul and my Father Saint Jerome direct! Instead of which, if fathers wish to educate their daughters beyond what is customary, for want of trained older women and on account of the extreme negligence which has become women’s sad lot, since well-educated older women are unavailable, they are obliged to bring in men teachers to give instruction...As a result of this, many fathers prefer
leaving their daughters in a barbaric, uncultivated state to exposing
them to an evident danger such a familiarity with men breeds.\textsuperscript{58}

In her \textit{Letter to Sor Filotea de la Cruz}, she defends and advocates the rights of women, especially
religious women, to have access to learning and use it in whatever form they chose, in the service of
Christ and of the Church.\textsuperscript{59}

Eventually, Juana became involved in local ecclesiastical politics. She was forced to defend her
whole way of life and her intellectual activities. A bishop instigated attacks on her secular work. He
exercised his authority over a woman whose fame and favor at court had overshadowed the prestige
of the local clergy. Juana argued by saying that Paul did not forbid women to study and teach in
private places. She compared herself to Catherine of Alexandria who was persecuted for her
learning, and said,

\begin{quote}
It is of service to the Church that women argue, tutor, learn: for he
who granted women reason would not have them uninformed.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Her inclination to study was born of God, but it also cost her much pain and suffering. In one of
her letters she said:

\begin{quote}
There was a rouse of emulations and persecutions, so many that I
cannot even count...I have been persecuted for my love for
wisdom and literature, Not because I had reached one or the
other....I have been persecuted through hate and malevolence.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

Perhaps exhausted emotionally over all this political battle, or, perhaps discovering new avenues
of liberation which she practiced within the confines of her convent, she gradually gave in to
ecclesiastical pressure by surrendering her books and instruments, and abandoned her studies.

There is no doubt that Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was a very strong
woman, both spiritually and intellectually. Her numerous plays,
letters and writings illustrated this very well. However, in 1692 Sor
Juana sold her library, musical and scientific instruments and
 donated the proceeds to charity. Soon after, in 1693, and perhaps
under threat of severe persecution, Sor Juana signed a declaration
of faith, and repented from her secular studies. She wrote in blood,
"I, (SJI) the worst of all". In 1694 Sor Juana renewed her vows and
lived a quiet life until her death in 1695.\textsuperscript{62}

At the age of 42, Sor Juana allegedly stopped writing philosophical, theological and literary
works. To quote Beatriz Couch:

\begin{quote}
Free as she (Sor Juana) was and possessed of the knowledge that
the soul is constructor of its own prisons and its own free open
spaces, Sor Juana wanted to surrender totally to her vocation. For
her the greatest "goodness" was to die freely surrendered to her
own condition, bonded to the mystical body of Christ.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

A few years before her death, her theological work \textit{A Letter (or Answer) to Sor Filotea de la Cruz},
and the first volume of her \textit{Complete Works} began to surface and read by scholars and theologians.
\textsuperscript{64} Among the titles accorded her today is "The First Feminist in the New World."
Edith Stein (1891-1942)

Edith Stein, like Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, was a child prodigy. Born of Jewish parents in Breslau, Germany, young Edith showed early signs of aptitude for learning. Graduating Summa Cum Laude with a doctoral degree in philosophy, she later became the assistant and collaborator of Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. However, given the gender discrimination at the time, she never received an appointment at the university. She was later employed as a professor at a women's college and at a Catholic institute, but due to the anti-Semitic legislation imposed by the Nazi regime, Edith soon found herself jobless.

In her teenage years, Edith had no interest in religion and considered herself an atheist but her life was marked with an earnest quest for truth. She later experienced conversion with what she felt was a discovery of truth after reading the life of Teresa of Avila.

While visiting her friend and fellow philosopher Hedwig Conrad-Martinus in 1921, she picked up a copy of Teresa of Avila's autobiography. She read it straight through, in a night, and when she was finished, she said "This is the truth." She never said more about her conversion, never explained precisely what spoke to her in those pages. When Conrad-Martinus later asked her to divulge the details, Stein replied, "Secretum meum mihi" (my secret is mine, my secret is unto me).

Thereafter she felt drawn to contemplative life like that of Teresa of Avila, but she was advised by her confessor to defer entry to religious life, and to use instead her intellectual gifts in the service of other Catholic women.

Much to her Jewish mother's distress, Edith converted to Catholicism at the age of 32 and helped Catholic women grow professionally and domestically by word and life style. Her commitment for the cause of women can be traced to her university days. She joined the Prussian Society for Women's Rights to Vote and protested the absence of women from university faculties. The following quotation from her autobiography reflects her concerns for women at the time.

Let woman equal be with man, So loud this suffragette avers In days to come we surely can See that a Cabinet post is hers.

In 1933, she joined the Discalced Carmelites. While at Carmel, Edith was encouraged by her superiors to share her talents by writing articles and books. Her writings reveal her philosophical thought and spirituality which, simply put, is that the human person and the world go together. Sullivan claims that at a time when the "flight from the world," or fuga mundi, was the safe recipe for any Catholic searching to lead a holy life, Stein said that one can find God in the world by bringing God to the world. In a letter to a friend she stated,

I was of the opinion that to lead a religious life meant one had to give up all that was secular and to live totally immersed in thoughts of the Divine. But gradually I realized that something else is asked of us in this world and that, even in the contemplative life, one may not sever the connection with the world. I even believe that the deeper one is drawn into God, the more one must "go out of
oneself' .... That is one must go to the world in order to carry the
divine life into it.  

It is not surprising therefore that she was attracted to Teresa of Avila whose mysticism and zeal
for renewal were inseparable and whose prayer went hand in hand with alertness to the needs of the
Church in her time. Edith considered her writing, giving lectures or conversations with people as
her contribution to the betterment of the world or as she puts it "salvation of humankind." The
persecution by the Nazi movement was a repressive factor in Edith's life when she was just
beginning to spread her wings, so to speak, like a bird meant to soar in the sky.  

But, Edith believed that everything that happens to a person is all in God's plan. She explains:
....from God's point of view---nothing is accidental, that My entire
life, even in the most minute detail, was pre-designed in the
plans of divine providence and is thus for the all-seeing eye of God
a perfect coherence of meaning. 

When she and her sister were arrested for being Jewish and convert, Edith went with great calm
and gave comfort and courage not only to her sister but also to all the others especially the children
in the concentration camp. She found an inner strength
....in the knowledge that being holds me (herself), I rest securely.
This security however is not the self-assurance who under her own
power stands on firm ground, but rather the sweet and blissful
security of the child that is lifted up and carried by a strong arm. 

The order of their arrest was in retaliation to the Dutch bishops' pastoral statement protesting the
deportation of Jews and the expulsion of Jewish children from Catholic schools. Her last words
recorded was of her consoling her distraught sister as they dragged them to the gas chamber
estimated to have been around August 9, 1942: "Come Rosa. We are going for our people."

Indeed her inner strength rooted in her trust in divine providence is one legacy of her life. She was
proclaimed a saint on October 11, 1998.

**Ita Ford (1940-1980) and Maura Clarke (1931-1980)**

The life of these women stands as a testimony not so much for any single individual life as it is a
testimony of a journey of women on the road to liberation and justice. This journey has taken them
to the poor and oppressed in Latin America. It is in this historical context that we meet Maryknoll
Sisters, Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, who along with Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and a young lay
missioner, Jean Donovan, were murdered in El Salvador at the hands of ruthless men whose
individual identities do not matter as much as the corrupt system under which they were operating:
the institutionalized violence against the majority of the Latin Americans who were seeking
liberation from all forms of servitude. These women found themselves in a situation of sin where
the masses were subjected to abject poverty and repression, a situation that has been blamed on
those in the upper classes and foreign monopolies that represent an 'international imperialism of
money.' With their deep faith in God and love for people, they committed their lives to the mission
of the Church, and embraced the vulnerability of the struggling poor and oppressed seeking social
transformation and liberation from a sinful situation in Latin America. The wisdom of their faith,
Sr. Melinda Roper says, is that their lives were not focused against evil and sin but upon the
holiness of human life. 73

Ita and Maura were both from Brooklyn, New York. Born and raised as Catholics during the 20th
century, both were knowledgeable of the Vatican II teachings of the Church, and were guided by,
what has become a motto for those who work with the poor and oppressed, the preferential option
for the poor. As women missioners, Ita and Maura worked hand in hand with the laity, religious,
bishops and priests in responding to the issues of poverty and violence in their midst, in the pursuit
of justice.

Maura learned from the people how to work with the poor. One day in Nicaragua, where she was
previously assigned, some members of the Christian community whom she was trying to help said
to her: "You are always ready to give us bread and shoes and money, but maybe it would be better
for all of us to try to understand why it is that we are poor and to look for solutions together."

Sometime in 1974, she wrote to her parents about a woman whom she was helping:

...She was taken into custody unjustly by the National Guard under suspicion of belonging to a union of farmers or something. She was raped by 15 soldiers, a few of them officers, for about three or four
days. This is one case but there are many like it. The other women are afraid to reveal such a thing. This young woman is beautiful
and has a striking natural dignity. We went to court to support her.

She came to love the people with whom she worked and struggled so that even during her
vacation and retreat time, she carried their pain in her heart. On one occasion while on retreat, she
received news about the death of the leaders of the Sandinista and the disappearance of campesinos
in a place she had worked. She wrote this account in a notebook:

I entered into a time of sadness and deep loneliness and wept over
my separation from the people I love, the Sisters, Fathers, all. I saw
the tortured people who fight for justice today in the place of
Christ, and I pictured the rulers and the military as the high priests.
I envisioned the poor...as the tortured Jesus.

Before she went to El Salvador, Maura wrote to her parents:

I would really love to stay here in Nicaragua but I know I must go
to El Salvador to see if it is right for me to be there. Don't worry....
Pray that the work of God in freeing his people here and
everywhere in the world can become more evident and grow in
strength. We must not be afraid. No matter what happens, we are
one with God and with one another.

El Salvador, a naturally beautiful little country, became a geographical site for Ita and Maura's
mission and later their final resting place. Similar to other countries in Latin America, the gap
between the rich and the poor was evident. Ita and Maura knew the level of violence and suffering
that was there and the personal risk they faced. Bishop Oscar Romero, who was known for his
holiness and love for the truth and fearless denouncement of violence and repression, and for his incessant calls for peace and reconciliation, was assassinated. Ita, who had been immersed with the poor in El Salvador long before Maura joined her, wrote:

I don't know if it is in spite or, because of the horror, terror, evil, confusion, lawlessness, but I do know that it is right to be here. To activate our gifts, to use them in this situation, to believe that we are gifted in and for Salvador now, that the answers to the questions will come when they are needed, to walk in faith one day at a time with the Salvadorans along a road filled with obstacles, detours and sometimes washouts....It is a privilege to come to a Church of martyrs and people with a strong committed faith.

Ita and Maura were surrounded daily with death, confusion and even fear but they were determined nevertheless to accompany the struggling poor on their journey to freedom. Able to maintain their inner peace and strength, they were a solace to their friends and families with whom they communicated regularly. Ita's letter to her niece on her birthday was one of her last:

First of all, I love you and care about you and how you are....And that holds if you are an angel or goof-off, a genius or a jerk. A lot of that is up to you and what you decide to do with your life. What I want to say. Some of it isn't too jolly birthday talk, but it's real. Yesterday I stood looking down at a 16 year old who had been killed a few hours earlier. I know a lot of kids even younger who are dead. This is a terrible time in El Salvador for youth. A lot of idealism and commitment are getting snuffed out here now. The reasons why so many people are being killed are quite complicated, yet there are some clear simple strands. One is that many people have found a meaning to live, to sacrifice, struggle and even die. And whether their life spans 16 years, 60 or 90, for them their life has had a purpose. In many ways, they are fortunate people. Brooklyn is not passing through the drama of El Salvador, but some things hold true wherever one is, and at whatever age. What I am saying is that I hope you can come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you, something that energizes you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can't tell you what it might be. That's for you to find, to choose, to love. I can just encourage you to start looking and support you in the search. Maybe this sounds weird and off-the wall, maybe no one else will talk to you like this but then too, I'm seeing and living things that others around you aren't. I hope this does not sound like some kind of a sermon because I don't mean it that way. In fact, it's my birthday present to you. If doesn't make sense to you at this moment, keep this and read it some time from now. Maybe it will be clearer....

The social and political involvements of Ita displeased the civil and military authorities. Her name was soon included in the death list of the military. On December 2, 1980, Ita and Maura along with Dorothy and Jean were on their way home from the airport when they were abducted by members of the National Guard Troops in El Salvador. They were subsequently raped and killed. On December 3, 1980 their dead bodies were found. After a long and painful process, the perpetrator members of the National Guard were convicted and were sentenced to 30 years imprisonment on May 23-24, 1984.
Ita Ford and Maura Clarke are exemplars of women in contemporary times who believe that the kin-dom of God is where justice and peace reigns. They are an inspiration to missionaries around the world, especially to Church women of today.

Conclusion

There is an urgency in the air even as we write. There is a call for solidarity among women and men to stop violence and prevent the utter destruction of human and ecological communities. Fear and anxiety pervade in much of the world, and civilization is once again threatened by an impending war dubbed as a “war against terrorism.” Leaders of imperialist states are campaigning for an all out war against those who challenge their dominance even as people and nations struggle to maintain peace and order knowing that true peace could come about only by the way of truth and justice. Innocent people of poor nations especially women and children are dragged into a situation of which they have no control and in which they will suffer much and will even lose their lives. It is precisely to this kind of situation that women (and men) are called to respond. And we will do so from our respective locations just as the women discussed had done in their life-time.

We, women and men, are a product of our history. We are conditioned by the environment in which we live, starting in the home itself with our families and relatives. Whatever values we pick up along the way, whether in the area of religion or politics, start in our neighborhoods and local communities. Here we interact socially and culturally and learn the parameters in which we are expected to function. Deciding how far one can go regarding these societal and political parameters is what separates the leader from the follower. The women we have just reviewed were leaders in their own right. They proclaimed by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus. They were women who dared to go beyond what was expected and what was conventional and traditional during their time. Their courage and strength to risk including their life for the sake of their faith and their vision for justice carved in the pages of scriptures and the gospel accorded them titles such as saints, martyrs, doctors of the Church, etc. They inspire and guide us still as we move on in this journey to justice. With Jesus we long for that day when we can all enjoy peace.

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it was already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! (Luke 12:49-50)

5. Clericalization meant the establishment of hierarchical structures dominated and controlled exclusively by the male clergy and thus excluding women entirely from participating within the structures of power and
authority. The dispensing of the sacraments became the exclusive responsibility and task for the clergy. Formal education was restricted to the clergy.


8. Quoted in Mananzan, p. 8.

9. According to Aquinas: ... Males naturally excel at the higher faculty of reason; females have less rational capacity and are less capable of moral control. Good order requires that the naturally superior rule the naturally inferior. (Summa Theological pt. 1, q. 92, art. 1) See Ruether, Sexism and God Talk, p. 96.


12. Ibid. p. 65.

13. Ibid. p. 68.


15. Ibid. p. 48


20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid, Kung, p. 88

23. These include the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. This group is composed of women religious/nuns, pastors, and women lay theologians from the continents of Asia, South America, Africa, and ethnic groups in the USA who originated from the "third world" countries. Virginia Fabella explains: These women have expanded the familiar framework of liberation theology to include women's reality, an analysis of it, a faith reflection upon it, and a commitment to transform it. They believe that "... while human beings are important, Third World women's theology cannot only be people oriented... it needs to encompass the whole of creation of which humanity is a part. Third World Women's theology needs a creation centered theology that is liberation-oriented as well.... For while third world women--their body, their health and well being--have been the prime casualties of ecological and environmental abuse, they have been at the same time the worst victims of economic crunch, becoming the world's poorest of the poor. See Virginia Fabella, Beyond Bonding: A Third World Women's Theological Journey. EATWOT Publication, 1993.


26. The members of the Mantellate wore the habit but lived in their own homes, serving the needs of the poor and the sick under the direction of a Prioress and ultimately under the direction of the friars. See Noffke, Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue p. 4

27. Noffke, Catherine of Siena, pp. 41-42

28. Ibid

29. Ibid. pp. 39, 41.


31. Noffke, Catherine of Siena, p. 11.


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35. Weaver, New Catholic Women, p. 196.


40. Ibid. p. 25.


42. Ibid. p. xii
43. Ibid. p. 42
44. Ibid. p. xii
45. Ibid. pp. 43-44
47. Weaver, New Catholic Women, p. 195.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid. pp. 50-51
53. Ibid.
54. Life in the convent was probably very different than what one may expect. It is true that the nuns took vows of poverty and chastity, but it hasn't been shown that either rule was enforced. Sor Juana did live in a cell, but it resembled an apartment and was often on two floors. "A 'cell' was large enough for the nun, her servants, and even a girl or two who was living with the nun for education and safekeeping. It had a bathroom (with a tub and a way to heat water), kitchen, bedrooms, and a sitting room." The nuns also had many personal belongings in their "cells." They included books and jewelry, musical instruments, and scientific apparatus, including a microscope. See "Sor Juana" Online.
56. Lehmann, "Life in the Convent" accessed online (September 7, 2002) at http://infocenter.ccit.arizona.edu/~ws/ws200/fall97/grp10/Convent.html
57. Sor Juana strongly disagreed with male teachers, believing them to be physical and sexual threats to the female students. The men in society considered women's intelligence and knowledge power, and this power was very threatening to them. Because the men felt threatened, they had many knowledgeable women persecuted. This caused many women to cease studying science, chemistry, homeopathy, medicine, and surgery. See Lehmann, Accessed Online (September 7, 2002)
58. Ibid.
59. Couch, Sor Juana Inez, p. 56.
60. Lehman, Life in the Convent
61. Couch, Sor Juana Inez, p. 52.
62. Lehman, Life in the Convent.
63. Couch, Sor Juana Ines p. 54
64. Ibid.
67. Ibid. p. 94
68. Ibid. p. 37.
69. "Nazi policies prevented many of her works from this period, including her masterpiece, Finite and Eternal Being, from appearing in print. Some of her letters now preserved in the archives of the State University of New York at Buffalo are poignant pleas for help in getting that book published in the United States. More than 50 years after her death this has yet to be done, partly because of posthumous fights over her literary remains. See Payne" From "Edith Stein: A Fragmented Life.
70. Ibid. p. 71.
71. Ibid. p. 20
72. Judith M. Noone, The Same Fate as the Poor, New York: Orbis, 1996
Please note that aside from personal sharings by other Maryknoll Sisters, Noone's book is the sole reference for this section, and all quotations are taken from the same book.
73. An excerpt from a talk by Sr. Melinda Roper who was then President of the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic when Ita Ford and Maura Clark were killed in El Salvador.
74. The word kin-dom is used instead of kingdom to infer inclusivity and relationality in God reality. It is borrowed from Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, the author of the classic book on feminist theology "In Memory of Her."

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Noone, Judith M, *The Same Fate as the Poor.* New York: Orbis, 1996.


Questions for Reflection:

1. Which of the women described in this article could you relate with the most? Why?
2. As a religious and church person, what aspect of these women’s lives do you find inspiring and challenging?
3. What conditions in the Church or ecclesial bodies are needed to better facilitate faithful witnessing of God’s love and compassionate justice?
4. Are there existing programs in your community or local church that aims to promote just relationships, gender sensitivity and women’s rights and dignity?
5. How do you see yourself, your community, your local church contributing toward the promotion of justice, particularly mutuality of relationships within the Church, in the third millennium?
6. Given the realities of the poor and unjust situations in your locality or country, how do you see yourself as a Dominican—a contemplative in action?

Closing Ritual

Call to Prayer----- Sound of Gong, tambuli or the like

Blessing of the place: The Prayer leader (woman) enters. She blesses the place with water while invoking the presence of God, the Saints, and our ancestors.

Leader: O God, Creator of life and of all creatures, You call upon us, your Church, to activate the springs of life into the world especially to the poor and marginalized. We confess, our failures, our neglect to keep these springs of life flowing and active. O God this we confess.

All: Our hearts need to be renewed with the fire of your love. (RESPONSE)

Leader: We confess that we have not listened to the Word through the person of our women in the church, thus missing part of divine wisdom and God reality. O God this we confess. RESPONSE

Leader: We confess that we often forget the concerns of our less privileged and voiceless sisters and brothers; we remiss in the care and healing of one another; in the face of violence we remain callous and deaf. O God this we confess. RESPONSE

Leader: We confess our arrogance and self-righteousness putting often the law over and above the human person; we become uncompassionate; we become unfaithful to the Gospel of Jesus. O God this we confess. RESPONSE

ALL: Compassionate God

We humbly stand before you.

We thank you for your faithful and steadfast love.

We thank you for constantly calling us

Share your desire to transform Life.

Inspirit us so that we may seek to cultivate springs of life

And that we ourselves be always active springs of life for others.

God give us strength and courage now and forever.

Amen.

To symbolize our communion and oneness, everybody is encouraged to drink from a spring/fountain/bowl/glass of water (depending on what is available) set up nearby.

(Form is inspired by the Liturgy of Celebration "Forces of Women-Streams into River" by the Hong Kong Women Christian Council. In God’s Image, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1998.)
CHAPTER IV

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

ANCIANA, LADY OF PERU
WOMEN’S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

"The human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community."

_Vienna Declaration and Action Program. Approved by the World Congress on Human Rights, Vienna, June 25, 1993_

Luisa Campos O.P. and Maritze Trigos T., O.P.

We have briefly reviewed the history of women’s search for recognition of the space that rightfully belongs to them in both the public and the private sphere. In this necessary preliminary step, the following have been explored:

- the causes of the inequalities between women and men, analyzing the manner in which women have prepared the way and, in not a few instances, have spilled their blood in the conquest of their space in different fields of action;
- reflections on the liberating encounters of Jesus with the examples of three women in the Bible;
- a brief review of the panorama of women in the Catholic Church

Before treating the topic of this chapter, it is important to place women in their present context.

A. Women in the Present Context

Data offered by the UN dated May 1, 2002 indicates:

The majority of the 1500 million persons who live with one dollar or less a day are women. Besides, the gap that separates men from women trapped in the cycle of poverty has continued to expand in the last decade, a phenomenon that has come to be known as the “feminization of poverty.”

The drama of the precariousness which the majority of women have to confront daily becomes ever more burdensome. The dramatic consequences of the economic crisis that profoundly affect quality of life are felt principally by them. These consequences become worse every day as a result of a dehumanizing neo-liberalism in which profit takes precedence over the person and because of the free market economy imposed on defenseless populations by the policies of industrialized countries and their allies in third world countries. Childhood malnutrition experienced today will bring irreparable consequences in the future.

This inhuman situation has strong repercussions, diminishing and destroying the life of the impoverished and the excluded, among whom women and children are the most affected.
The ongoing menace of war now developing in various parts of the world also strikes out at defenseless populations, the majority of them innocent, in a way that is cruel, merciless, unjust and horrible. Those who now argue for the fight against terrorism seem to incline the balance toward one side, without perceiving that often the reaction against terrorism is a greater and, in many cases, more violent and devastating form of terrorism.

War presents multiple faces of women; they are there as combatants, messengers, nurses, food providers, burden bearers, sentinels, etc. But women are also present in the civilian population, suffering the attacks and destruction of war:

Women and girls experience armed conflict principally as part of the civil population and, as such, they are usually exposed to acts of violence, including indiscriminate military attacks and the prevalence of mines, causing injury and death; they are also exposed to the lack of essential means for survival and medical attention and limitations in their means for sustaining themselves and their families. Women and girls, just as men and boys, are victims of disappearances, hostage taking, torture, jailing, sexual violence and, because of their sex, forced recruitment in the armed forces, displacement.

We place ourselves in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, North America: in this world geography we remember the women of Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, Palestine, and the former Yugoslavia. In Latin America we see the faces of indigenous women, blacks and mestizas in Chiapas, Mexico, the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, groups of women in Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala, Columbia and Nicaragua. In Africa the women of the Congo, of South Africa under apartheid, of internal guerilla warfare, where the women have suffered and keep on suffering, in many places, the cruelest of tortures.

But as women they also struggle with faith, resist with hope, and silently sustain and strengthen with love and tenderness. They generate life in the midst of death, they develop proposals for justice, they create and continue dreaming of a new society, they organize, speak, and demand from the State respect for human rights and for the rights of peoples.

In these countries and many others from the different continents we find testimonies of women that describe for us this crude reality. Let us allow them to speak in their own voices:

From Africa

Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa: The Commission for Truth and Reconciliation in October of 1996 in Durban gives us testimonies of women who were declared a military objective for their political option and commitment, for the mission carried out together with their families and for the role played by their very physical space— the home.

The African National Congress (ANC), the Congress of South African Union Members and the United Democratic Front (UDC) oppose the Inkatha Freedom party, which governed oppressively and unjustly since 1977.
The fight of these women against racial oppression was significant. The women faced the security forces, the army, and the battalions of death. They were looking for their daughters, their husbands and their brothers. In the words of one woman,

We have important documents about the night vigils organized by the women in Chesterville, during which they faced the armed forces and they hid from the soldiers who wanted to detain them and kill them in place of their sons. (...) The white women united with the black women and with their sons who did not want to fight. These women were mistreated and harassed. They put them up on the police wagons, they detained them, and they condemned them to exile. (Nozizwe Madiali Routledge)

Frieda Majozi had fled with her two sons because they were witnesses of the massacre of their neighbors. When they returned to the house where her husband was, she recognized the group of men from the Inkatha Freedom Command. This woman tells the story:

I was wearing an apron, Justice cut it with a knife and then he grabbed me forcefully by the feet. The others took part in the aggression and rapidly immobilized me, while Justice raped me. They made my husband watch everything that happened. Every time he tried to look away they beat him. When Justice finished raping me they poured water in my vagina. When I tried to close my legs they beat me. Those young boys also took turns raping me and pouring water in my vagina. (...) When I came to in the hospital, I realized that my womb and been sewn up and that I had had a hysterectomy.

Frieda reported the crime to the police, but they rejected her accusation. She had to flee and live as if she were in jail. Her husband is now an epileptic and cannot work.³

From Latin America and the Caribbean

a. In Colombia, state terrorism leaves no room for democracy, free expression or the right to construct a new country with equal conditions. The situation is becoming more critical. The National Security Law (684) and the Decree of Internal Commotion (State of Emergency) are the most evident means of militarization, repression, persecution and death in a war which causes more and more bloodshed for the people of Colombia. Plan Colombia with the intervention of the United States worsens, complicates and prolongs the war conditions.

All the rights of women have been violated beginning with the fundamental right to life. They are victimized by hundreds of extra-judicial assassinations, tortures, and forced disappearances. Women are denied the rights to culture, land, their beliefs, as well as political opinions. They suffer from forced displacement and violent sexual rapes. But Colombian women are resisting. They prophetically denounce, demand and require respect for their rights and the rights of their people. They organize, protest and, through the clarification of the truth, the construction of justice and the demand for integral reparation, enter into a process of peace. For this is the dream that sustains their lives.
In this systematic annihilation, women's blood is violently spilled. There are various cases in which young or adult women are assassinated after cruel tortures. They are forced to kneel and beg for pardon. They have their breasts cut off and suffer the introduction of objects into the vagina. Women's bodies have been quartered, their eyes extracted and their internal organs removed from their bodies. Their cadavers are thrown into common graves, the river or into surrounding swamps. 4

Some of the Principles of Women's Organizations that resist war in Colombia and construct Peace with Justice

- The realities of the country require of us an ethical and political posture against war.
- We will not give birth to more sons for the war. Not one more day, not one more peso, not one more man, not one more woman for the war. Everything for life.
- It is better to exist with fear than to stop existing because of fear.
- Solidarity among women against war is not a dream but a reality: together we have decided to value the gesture, the sentiment, the tenderness, the word against death: beginning here and now, we will continue building together, knitting together the subtle but tenacious threads which will embroider our future country. 5

b. In Vieques, Puerto Rico

The fight to get the United States navy off the island of Vieques is also women's concern

Before the arrival of the U.S. Navy, the economy of the island was based on the cultivation of sugar cane. The appropriation by the navy of the majority of cultivated land led to the disappearance of this crop and produced unemployment, migration and displacement, misery and hunger. Those who remained on this Puerto Rican island called Nena Island, suffered constant bombardment, the destruction of archeological sites, restrictions on movements, etc.

Milagro Lopez gives witness to women's fight to liberate Vieques from the presence and action of the United States Navy. She says the women united in one movement. Mothers, workers, teachers and students actively participate in picketing as well as cultural and educational activities against military personnel in the civil sector.

The Conference of Methodist Women, in spite of receiving threatening calls, decided to participate in an act of civil disobedience which was carried out on the Navy lands. This organization, which includes more than 7000 women, has been petitioning for peace in Vieques for many years. This group, together with the group "Alliance of Women of Vieques," participated actively in the civil disobedience camps.

These women were detained, handcuffed and their feet were chained. Upon leaving the Federal Building of the United States in
Puerto Rico after a hearing on the charges they were received with applause and signs of solidarity. The fight continues and today as always the women continue participating in it.  

**From North America**

War drums are sounding. Preparations are being carried out to attack whole peoples with the rationale of ending terrorism, despite a global opposition to such a preemptive strike which is seen by the majority of world population as motivated principally by interest in controlling Middle East oil reserves. Betsy, an African-American mother, and Maria, an Hispanic mother, in the United States, anxiously confide their fears of the coming war. Their only sons have already been notified to go overseas. The mothers cry and their sobs speak of impotence before a senseless war, which will only benefit the economy of a few. The war could take away the lives of those whom these women alone, and with great effort and love, have struggled to make into good sons.

Elizabeth, a young White woman, who watches the scene with her two-month old daughter in her arms, can understand this drama because of the possibility that her young husband may also be called up to war. (Testimony of a person who knows the women involved.)

**From Europe and Asia-Pacific (Voices of women in the middle of war)**

The crowd was so big that you couldn't see how far away the last ones were. They were bombarding from everywhere. It was incredible! A grenade fell behind us and the members of one family left a son on the road and took care of the other children once they were sure the boy was dead. (Woman in the territory of the former Yugoslavia)

In my opinion I was the greatest soldier. Although the real soldiers fought on the front lines, we, the wives, fought our own war. (Woman returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina)

War is destruction...our sons are lost...our husbands have left...we don't have anything...our houses are destroyed...What can we describe? (from Lebanon)

You don't know where to look for help because everyone is running away. We ran away following orders. (Woman returning to Cambodia)

Certainly our greatest hope is that the war end and that everything begin again. We will begin from zero, but, at least, it will be a beginning. (Housewife in Afghanistan)

These testimonies are a small sample from around the world. Where you live, where you share the mission, there will be hundreds of cases of women who suffer war or situations of discrimination and violence: they touch your heart, come to your door, get under your skin, move your conscience, call you to commitment. God is revealed there, God is there calling for justice.
In spite of the dramas which have been described, it is also the women themselves who, even within the harsh reality of this situation of extreme suffering, are making great efforts every day in their search for a world that is just, sustainable and peaceful.

**Now is the time to ask ourselves:**

1. What other testimonies are you familiar with from your geographic reality?
2. What systemic injustices are hidden in each of these testimonies?
3. In light of the contemplative, merciful and compassionate attitude of Dominic and Catherine, what impact do these women have on us?
4. As the Dominican Family what can we do to contribute to the creation of a society that is more just and equal for women?

After this brief vision of the situation of women, which, because of the limits of this paper, does not pretend to be exhaustive, we can take a further step in order to deepen our consideration of the topic of this booklet: “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights.”

In order to consider the energy which the International Conferences of the United Nations have awakened about women's situation in the last quarter of the twentieth century, we will first analyze these conferences. Then we will examine the juridical documents which, in the last half century and very especially in the last 25 years, have contributed to situating the cause of gender equity in the center of global interest.

**B. The International Conferences on Women**

Someone, commenting on the Conferences of the United Nations on women said:

*It began with a year,*

*It was transformed into a decade.*

*It gave birth to a movement,*

*and it became a revolution.*

Certainly the person who said that was not mistaken. The energy awakened by the Conferences of Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995 has marked the advances in women's struggle to seek gender equity. The Women’s Conferences have constituted one of the most exceptional achievements of the last 25 years, if not that of most relevance worldwide.

Each of the Conferences has had its own characteristics. The 1975 Conference is considered the foundation for the greatest growth in consciousness. The conference of 1980, is regarded as the creator of the articulation of networks among women; that of 1985, the originator of “the birth of
feminism on a world scale. The Conference of 1995 has been characterized by women's increased political activity.

While each Conference has had its own characteristics, nonetheless the goals of equality, development and peace, determined by the Conference of Mexico in 1975, have been a constant and a kind of guiding thread that has been reaffirmed in each of the following Conferences. Another constant that has been maintained and has intensified since the first has been the active presence of thousands of women organized in NGO's and/or on a personal level, who through Parallel Forums in each of the places of the Conferences have contributed to establishing bridges with the official delegations. Although this didn't occur in a very active way in the first two, it gathered force in Nairobi and in Beijing so as to guarantee that the most critical topics for women have been included in the deliberations and in the documents.

An important achievement of these four conferences has been the recuperation and appropriation by women of favorable legislation that had remained unknown, as well as the approval of new vitally important legal documents for the advancement of gender equity and the articulation of strategies to spread information for women's empowerment at every level.

1. First World Conference (Mexico, D.F., June 19 to July 2, 1975)

(See Appendix Chap. IV-1 at www.op.org/dsi/ or www.op.org/curia/jpc)

Six thousand women and men arrive in Mexico to discuss and approve the Plan of World Action for Women as well as the implementation of the objectives of the International Women's Year. One hundred twenty-five of the 133 member-states participate.

Urged by the Conference of Mexico, five months later the Assembly XXX of the UN according to Resolution No. 3520 promulgates the declaration of the Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace for the years 1976-1985. Thus is begun a new world-wide effort to promote women's advancement by initiating a global dialogue about gender equality.

Objective of the Conference of Mexico

The objective is to precisely describe a society in which women participate in a real and complete sense in economic, social and political life, as well as to devise strategies by means of which this type of society can be developed. (Par. 14 of the Plan)

Toward this end the year, 1975 is proclaimed International Women's Year. At this time the problematic of today's women is established and, beginning with this diagnostic, Programs and Actions for the Decade are designed.

In Part I, Chapter 1 the report emphasizes women's equality and their contribution to development and peace. After various considerations, it promulgates 30 Principles of Equal Rights for Women. (See Appendix, Chap. 4-2 web pages cited)
The Plan of Action contributes concrete directives on international cooperation and the strengthening of world peace, education, health, family, employment, population, housing and political participation.

The resolutions and decisions approved by the Conference revolved around:

- Women and health, prevention of the exploitation of women, women in family and society
- The Plan of Equality before the Law, which requires that it be integral, includes the spheres of education, work and family
- Social and political participation as a contribution of women to world peace
- Women and the process of development, social security, popular participación
- A request that special attention be paid to Palestinian, Chilean, Vietnamese, Arabic and South African women, given the political context at that moment.

There were debates on equality, development and peace. Many were convinced of the necessity for a revolutionary change in the structure of society and the creation of a new international economic order. Without these it is difficult to achieve peace which requires the equal rights demanded by justice. These three aspects constituted the center of the work for the International Women's Year together with the fight against neocolonialism, apartheid and for the independence of peoples.

Mexico constitutes a significant advance: women are finally listened to at the international level, are constituted as subjects of history, have their feminine consciousness awakened, have new possibilities opened to them for the achievement of their integral rights.

2. The Second World Conference (Copenhagen, July 14-30, 1980)

(See Appendix Chap. IV-3 on web pages cited)

Resolution 33/185 of 1975 provides for the celebration in Copenhagen of the Second World Conference on Women to examine and evaluate the progress achieved during the first half of the Decade.

The 80's bring significant changes in Latin America with new meanings in social, economic, political and ideological matters. Women become more visible through the feminist movements which since the 70's have been appearing and opening the way. In this first period of women's awakening there are already results in the legal field.

**Objective of Copenhagen**

The objective is to evaluate the first five years of the Decade, acknowledging the achievements as well as the obstacles to the objectives proposed in Mexico, and to summarize the existing international consensus about the measures to be adopted for women's advancement.

The evaluation based on data gathered about the situation, concludes:

...the objectives established in the World Plan remained as difficult to reach as in 1975; nonetheless, due to their greater detail and clearer focus, this image should provide the basis for practical
action-oriented strategies for the rest of the decade. . .the situation of women in all countries was conditioned by world economic and political situations.

In the evaluation of the Action Plan at, national, regional and international levels a series of structural obstacles are found, indicating that no concrete actions have been taken in favor of women. Few financial resources, a sexist attitude, the lack of a consciousness of women’s value, are factors in the fact that the States have not exerted themselves to achieve the proposed goals.

Women’s resistance and struggle to achieve their integral rights awaken an interest in their own problematic so that they present proposals and establish new possibilities for equal rights together with men.


The Action Plan is also evaluated, and they recognize that in the area of law there are advances as far as the aspiration to equality is concerned, but that more convincing actions are needed, which include the self-determination of peoples. Now women not only struggle for themselves, but they also aspire to social and political change.

In order to achieve development it is necessary to establish a more just and egalitarian economic order; this demands a greater participation of women in the development of peoples.

With regard to peace, it is important to fight for disarmament and against dictatorships and neocolonialism. Women should participate actively in these processes of building a peace based on justice and the self-determination of peoples.

In Copenhagen the acceptance of a resolution about trafficking in women is achieved and an international study of the problem is requested of the UN. In this Convention women are provided with an international instrument for pressuring States to denounce and confront the practices of "trafficking in women and exploitation of women's prostitution." Two years later, in 1982, a Special Rappaporter is named and a report is made to the United Nations in January, 1983; this is one of the most important actions carried out in this five year period with regard to the problem of prostitution and trafficking in women.

Actually this first five-year period of the World Action Plan was poor. Given the lack of political will and the impediment to change caused by attachment to traditional customs no great gains are achieved. It’s noted that women initiate an open process of political struggle, although education in this matter is still lacking, but the patriarchal culture continues to weigh heavily in decision-making. Economic, political and legal impediments exist.

In Copenhagen the topic of development was again taken up, and the Conference advanced a little on the topic of peace. With regard to concrete commitments there is an awareness of the importance of moving from de jure to de facto equality so that changes will not be just laws on the books, but also be carried out in practice. This demands a change of mentality, a change of
stereotypes, of roles and functions of men and women, a radical change in the structures of the social system. It reestablishes the identity of men and women and their social functions.

The sentiment which is revealed is that, in effect, the States do not sufficiently promote this commitment and although the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in existence since 1967, proposes a common goal for all States, it only provided moral and political intentions, since it lacked legal binding force and it was not until a year before the Copenhagen conference that it was signed and became effective.

Compliance on the part of many governments in some aspects of the Plan appears to be instrumental to their political interests. In the majority of countries the absence of channels for consultation, dialogue and negotiation between civil society and the state has been constant; as well as the lack of transparency in government actions around compliance with the Plan.

With regard to the achievement of rights concretized in some norms and laws, women of the whole world have succeeded in organizing, uniting, and becoming subjects of history, constituting a means of pressure and power for social change.

Irigaray points out:

one must struggle for equal rights so as to show differences (...) Men and women are not equal, and the strategy of equality, when it exists, should always presuppose the recognition of the differences.10

Copenhagen, in its evaluation of women's advancement, insists that legal equality is only a strategy to achieve equilibrium in the relationships of power, with respect to gender differences. The proclamation of laws is not sufficient; there is something deeper in the ethical and cultural ethos of peoples. Therefore in the next Conference in Nairobi, concrete strategies and measures to overcome obstacles in the achievement of women's rights will be established.

3. The Third World Conference (Nairobi, Kenya, from July 15 to 26, 1985)
(See Appendix Chap. IV-4 on web pages cited)

The Conference of Nairobi convoked by Resolution 35/136 completes the International Decade of Women initiated in Mexico in 1975.

Objective of the Conference of Nairobi:

The Conference is convoked in order to "Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace." After demonstrating with data that the betterment of women's legal situation and their efforts to diminish discrimination had not gained the hoped for results, the participants proceed to elaborate the "Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women."

About 15 thousand women representatives of NGO's participate in the Parallel Forum and for the first time the number of women coming from countries of the south surpass that of women from countries of the north. It is important to note that the participants gathered in Nairobi do not believe
that women's meetings should be discontinued at the end of the Decade. Their purpose is not to
diminish the force that the global feminist movement has acquired, but rather to give it a greater
push, even though the reality shown by the statistics is against them. The situation of women has
worsened since the meeting of 1980: women are poorer economically, they have fewer
opportunities of access to education and health service, and they have less security.

The delegates of the 157 participating governments formulate the "Forward-looking Strategies for
the Advancement of Women." In these strategies they delineate a plan of activities for women's
progress up to the year 2000. (Appendix Chap. VI-4 on web pages cited)

This plan establishes new guidelines when it declares that all issues are related to women. In the
document a series of measures geared to achieving equality on a national scale are established.
Governments should establish their own priorities in accord with their development policies and the
possibilities of their resources.

Measures to apply the basic strategies at a national level can be grouped in the following
categories:

- constitutional and legal measures;
- equality in social participation;
- equality in political participation and in decision-making.

The forward-looking strategies recommended in Nairobi include a broad spectrum of topics:
employment, health, education, science, communications and the environment. In addition,
directives are proposed for adopting measures in each nation directed toward fomenting women's
participation in the promotion of peace, as well as aiding women in special situations of
vulnerability.

Then, after the Conference of Nairobi, the General Assembly of the UN asks countries to
establish, where they do not yet exist, coordination centers for women's issues in all the sectors
included in the work of the UN. In this way the Conference of Nairobi establishes a broader focus
on women's progress, thus recognizing that the equality of women, far from being an isolated
matter, includes all human activities.

In addition to the strategy described, the delegations also convocate a Conference for the mid-90's
to evaluate the achievements in women's lives. This Conference is that of Beijing.

4. The Fourth World Conference (Beijing, China, from September 4 to 15, 1995)

(See Appendix Chap. IV-5A and IV 5B on web pages cited)

This Fourth World Conference on Women organized by the UN has been the most important
meeting on the topic of the global women's movement.

Objective of the Beijing Conference

The objective of this Conference is to elaborate a world program of equality geared toward the
protection of women's human rights, independently of their individual characteristics of race,
ethnicity, age, social condition, civil state, religion and culture.
Some 40,000 women from throughout the world, with 8,000 official delegations and government representatives from more than 189 countries, as well as some 30,000 persons belonging to NGO’s and a considerable number of persons participating at a personal level meet in Beijing, a convincing proof of the growth and strength of the global women’s movement. Of great importance is the strategy of the participants in the NGO Forum of establishing channels of communication with the official delegations in order to contribute their considerations on topics of vital importance for women.

Though the efforts of the three previous Conferences have contributed to the betterment of women’s situation and their access to resources, the truth is that they have not been able to produce changes in the basic structure of inequality in the relationships between women and men. It is necessary to find ways to strengthen women’s role so that they can make their own priorities and values prevail and thus participate on an equal footing with men in decision-making at every level. The need for women to be incorporated in the process of decision-making has begun to be evident in the course of various UN World Conferences on aspects of development at the beginning of the decade of the 90’s:

- The environment in Rio de Janeiro in 1992;
- Human Rights in Vienna in 1993;

Each of these conferences, though not specifically about women, insists that women participate fully in decision-making, and that women’s points of view be incorporated in the deliberations and documents that are approved. It is important to point out that the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna marks the effective recognition of women’s human rights as an integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and therefore, inalienable. This means a fundamental advance in the search for gender equality (see appendix Chap. IV -6 on web pages cited). It might also be pointed out that the slogan of “Women’s Rights are Human Rights” was chosen in the regional meeting in San José de Costa Rica in 1993 prior to the meeting in Vienna. There is another important proposal made by the Action Plan of the Cairo Conference in chapter IV, A.4.1 that says:

...it is necessary that women and men participate and intervene equally in productive and reproductive life, including the division of responsibilities for the rearing of children and the maintenance of the home.

With this statement, at least from a -formal legal perspective, there is finally a break from the traditional division of labor that has for centuries assigned the tasks of production to men and those of reproduction to women. Nevertheless not until the Conference of Beijing in 1995 can it be said that a new form of the struggle for gender equality is initiated.

The fundamental change produced in Beijing is the recognition of the need for transferring the focus of women’s attention to the concept of gender, and for recognizing that the whole structure of
society, and all the relationships between men and women within that structure, must be reevaluated.

Only through the essential restructuring of society and its institutions will it be possible to fully facilitate the role of women so that they may participate on equal footing with men in the different aspects of life. (Beijing Conference, 1995)

With this change the watchword carried by the women to the Conference on human rights in Vienna—"Women’s Rights are Human Rights"—was reaffirmed.

The Conference of Beijing has the merit of attracting unprecedented international attention and of renewing the commitment to strengthen the role of women everywhere. The Platform for Action for women of Beijing, in essence a program to strengthen the role of women, is debated and unanimously approved by the representatives of 189 governments.

The Platform for Action for Women (PFA) is a document written for the Conference of Beijing by the secretariat of the UN. This document with its modifications produced through the countries’ negotiations constitutes a document of consensus by the participating governments. While no official document contains the richness and the vision of the documents of the Forum of NGO’s, this Platform for Action is the key document of Beijing.

The Platform identifies 12 critical areas of interest, but it does not provide specific elements to achieve the goals, which would be the ideal. Its achievements will depend upon the recommendations for its application being committed to by all the governmental and non-governmental sectors in the search for a new quality of life for women.

(See Appendix Chap. IV-5 B on web pages cited)

The General Assembly of the UN convokes an extraordinary period of sessions to examine the progress achieved in the five years after the approval of the Beijing Platform for Action. This is known as Beijing + 5. In the year 2000 at the seat of the UN in New York, from July 5 to August 1 a meeting is held on the topic: “Women in the year 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace in the XXI Century.”

C. Legal Documents of Promotion and Defense of Women

In spite of the limitations in the application of international legislation concerning the promotion and defense of women’s rights, there are some achievements in the second half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless the achievements have not been a gift, but rather the fruit of the effort and perseverance of many women who have refused to accept the condition of second class citizens.

It’s good to recognize also that inequalities between women and men still persist, and they continue to be important obstacles impeding real gender equity. There are cultural and religious conditionings that legislation cannot eradicate simply because an international agreement or a local law goes into effect. Nonetheless it’s important to be familiar with legal documents and events
favorable to women's situation so as to be able to assume, propagate and defend them. (See Appendix Chap. IV-6 on web pages cited)

**World Legal Documents for the Promotion and Defense of Women**

Activities promoted by the women's movement, government action or organisms of international cooperation in the last quarter of the twentieth century, have contributed enormously to making known legislation favorable to women, as well as to promoting the approval of new legislation so that gender equality is advancing. A good example on the international level is the approval of the “Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women” of the UN (1979-CEDAW)

This continues to be a fundamental document for monitoring the progress of women in all the countries of the world.

This convention is, undoubtedly, the principal international instrument of human rights for women; however, the lack of mechanisms and precise procedures for putting it into practice makes its application difficult. In the first place, the Convention does not establish mechanisms for presenting accusations when a State violates one of the rights that it contains, nor does it impose sanctions. In the second place, it does not grant to the committee charged with evaluating its compliance, the necessary resources for carrying out its work, which limits its action to comply with its functions on time and effectively. All these limitations diminish the force of this important instrument. Nonetheless the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women adopts some measures and considers recommendations related to violence against women in the family as well as in other areas. (See Appendix Chap. IV-7 on web pages cited)

Not all the nations of the UN have ratified the Convention and others, although they have ratified it, do not give it the political weight it merits. A valuable detail to point out is that the United States of North America is the only industrialized country that has still not ratified the CEDAW.

**Regional Legal Documents of Promotion and Defense of Women’s Rights**

In the same way that world legal documents exist for the promotion and defense of women’s rights, there also exist regional legal documents for the same end. One example is that of the Americas.

**Continent of America (North America, Latin America and the Caribbean-OAS-Organization of American States)**

The Inter-American system of Human Rights and Women’s Rights establishes in its institutional legal framework that:

a basic principal of the Organization of American States, is respect for the fundamental rights of the person based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination

The Inter-American System of Protection of Human Rights has various instruments in defense of women’s rights, but the fundamental document for this purpose is the “Inter-American Convention
to Prevent, Sanction and Eradicate Violence against Women,” (See Appendix Chap. IV-8 on web pages cited). This document is better known as the Convention of Belem do Pará, the name of the city in northern Brazil where the Assembly takes place.

The strategic objective of this regional convention is to stimulate States to prevent the diverse forms of violence which women suffer and to incorporate a new mechanism so that women of the American continent may solicit and demand reparation for violent acts committed against them.

Persons and/or institutions can take cases regarding acts or omissions that violate the resolutions of the Convention to the Inter-American Women’s Commission (CIM) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

The Inter-American Women’s Commission created in 1928 is the first official inter-governmental institution in the world charged expressly with watching over the recognition of women’s civil and political rights. This Commission exercises a decisive role in the redaction of the Convention of Belem do Pará.

**Conclusion**

1. **Some Pending Tasks**

So that gender equity may be a reality in the future it is important to:

- Be familiar with and make known the legal documents, global as well as regional, that constitute advances in the search for equality between women and men;
- Promote the acquisition of elementary legal understandings;
- Commit to coordinated actions with non-governmental organizations, national States and the international community for the implementation of the proposals of the International Conferences;
- Articulate the efforts of women’s movement in networks on the local, regional and international levels in accord with the priorities of each region;
- Promote the creation of national and regional mechanisms which guarantee what was established in the Conference of Human Rights of Vienna, 1993: “... that the human rights of women are inalienable and constitute an integral and indivisible part of human rights;”
- Channel the demands of the women’s movement within the framework of human rights, because of the breadth of possibilities which open up when the instruments and mechanisms of human rights are used, both on the universal and regional levels.
2. **To Think and Reflect**

As part of the Dominican family, as inheritors of the search for Truth, concerned for the dimension of study, committed to the experience of God contemplated in the Word and in the signs of the times, and challenged to build Justice today, we ask ourselves:

- What will be the next step to take so that at the level of the Order we may commit ourselves to make gender equity a reality?
- What contributions can we offer on an educational level so that the category of gender may permeate the economy, politics, culture and religion in an integral form?
- How will we strengthen the movement of women's organizations while respecting cultures, geography, languages and religious beliefs?
- How will we collaborate among the different movements and organizations of the Dominican Order so that women's rights may be realized?

These questions constitute challenges offered to us by global reality; they serve as a way to measure our progress as we continue to evaluate our commitment to Justice and Peace.

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2. Organización Femenina Popular OFP, Document sent to Organizaciones Unidas e Internacionales, Barrancabermeja, June 13, 2002
3. PADARATH, Ashnie, Las Mujeres y la violencia en Kwazulu Natal-Sudafrica, pp. 92-94
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5. Movimiento Popular de Mujeres, Public communiqué, Bogota, July 25, 2002
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PRAYER/CELEBRATION

(The space is arranged with a cloth, a large candle, a plant and the Women's Rights booklet)

Leader: Mary, Mother of Justice and our Mother, we come before you today to beg your intercession so that the reflection we enter into here may be fruitful in our own lives and in the lives of our families and communities. (The leader will elaborate on this prayer as appropriate for the group.)

The leader then guides the reflection using the following:

Having studied the agreements and commitments of the World Conferences as well as the legislation in defense of women:

- What has most impressed you and why?
- Do we believe that the legal resources studied are signs of progress in the search for gender equity?
- What tasks can we commit ourselves to carry out in the search for gender equity?

After sharing some reflections the group tries to briefly summarize what has been expressed and then proceeds to a reading from the Gospel of Luke 13: 10-17.

The participants are invited to reflect personally in silence for a few minutes, and then share what it has meant to know the legal documents in defense of women in the light of the attitude of Jesus with the hunched/stooped women and to what commitments this Word calls us.

The commitment can be expressed with a simple gesture or symbol, chosen from whatever is at hand (a flower, a pen, notebook, etc.) expressing the personal meaning of the commitment.

The reflection ends with Dichosa Mujer or another appropriate Marian hymn known by the group.

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CEPAL "Declaración de la Articulación de Organizaciones de Mujeres Feministas de A.L. y el Caribe a la Plenaria de la VII Conferencia Regional sobre mujeres en America Latina y el Caribe.

Ibidem, Feministas de A.L. y el Caribe a la Plenaria de la VII Conferencia Regional sobre la mujer en A.L y Caribe.

CLADEM, Cumbres, Consensos y Después..., d. Roxana Vasquez, Lima, Peru, 1999
Glossary

CONFERENCE Meeting in which government delegates and functionaries participate. Conferences which treat global topics or specific topics are given a different weight.

CONVENTION An agreement which unites States in areas of vital but not strategic importance.

EQUALITY Principle according to which all individuals, without distinction of person, birth, class, religion or fortune, have the same legal vocation for the regimen, charges and rights established by law.

EQUITY 1. Conception of justice founded on equality before the law and respect for the rights of each person.
2. As opposed to positive law, a conception of justice which is not inspired by the legal norms in effect, and which can even be contrary to those norms.

INSTRUMENT A written document that gives formal expression to a legal act or to an agreement to create, confirm, modify or suppress a right.

RATIFICATION The constitutional process by which a legislative assembly or a parliament confirms the action of the government which has signed the agreement.

RESOLUTION The legislative product of the UN. A resolution usually does not create a bond, but it is a legal proof and carries authority when it interprets the United Nations Charter.

SIGNATURE The mark of heads of State or of their representatives which indicates the authenticity of the text of an agreement, and when ratification is not necessary, this signature indicates the will to be linked by this agreement.

SUMMIT In UN terms, summits differ from other meetings due to the participation in summits of heads of government and presidents. The commitments assumed in summits have a greater weight than those of other meetings.

TREATY A formal accord between States with a view to defining or modifying their reciprocal obligations and duties. A treaty is generally ratified by the States which sign it.
MARY MAGDALEN: "GO AND TELL YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS!"
FINAL CONCLUSION

We have come to the end of our booklet, which, because of its volume, seems more like a book. We have made every effort to synthesize and have been forced to omit texts for reasons of space, but we have tried to conserve what we consider essential for advancing our reflections on the search of women’s equality. May the God of Life who shows a maternal countenance through the actions of Jesus to restore women’s dignity, through Mary’s unconditional YES, in the fidelity of the women disciples of Jesus, in the compassion of Dominic, Catherine, Rose and so many men and women saints, help us to find in these pages a basis for constructing a world where women and men may live the truth that all are created equal and called to share in mutuality.

Walking in Reciprocity

I only desire that your dreams and my dreams unite,
That we construct together a new society;
That love and justice may be constructed in human otherness.

I invite you my male companion, to open new roads;
I invite you my female companion, to be Woman in plenitude,
Hope now unites us, liberty launches us to infinity!

(Last stanza of a poem by Maritza Trigos, O.P., Colombia)
Some Internet Sites On Gender


International Gender Studies Resources: http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/globalgender/

United Nations: Division for the Advancement of Women/ United Nations Development Fund
For Women/ Commission on the Status of Women/ International Research and Training
Institute for the Advancement of Women: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/

Women, Law and Development: http://www.wld.org

United Nations Coordination Centers and Bodies Concerned with Women's Affairs

Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW):

This Division stems from the Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in
Vienna. It is the center for coordinating all activities related with women in the United Nations
system. It monitors and evaluates the application of the Forward-looking Strategies of Nairobi
since 1985. It carries out investigations, maintains a database on women's bibliography since 1985,
and offers legal consultation on legal matters of prime importance. It publishes material on women,
such as Women 2000

P.O. Box 500
A-1400 Vienna, Austria
Tel. (431) 21131-4270  FAX 232156

Commission on the Status of Women

This Commission, composed of 45 members, was established in 1946 with the goal of
promoting women's political, economic, social, and educational rights; it gathers global data on the
status of women and makes reports and recommendations

New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel. (212) 963 5634

Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

This Commission is composed of 23 experts (jurists, lawyers, teachers, diplomats and experts
in women's issues) elected by the States which ratified the Convention; they act as individuals and
not as government representatives Their function is to monitor the application of the Convention on
the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, 1979.

New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel. (212) 963 5634

Department of Public Information

Produces printed material, films and information videos, radio and TV programs on women.
It organizes special events and informative meetings, and responds to requests for information. It
maintains connections on the topic of women.

New York, NY 10017 USA
Tel. (212) 963 0352  FAX 963 4556

International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
(INSTRAW)

Created in 1975 with the objective of developing and broadening investigation, training and
information relative to women and development. It promotes information and investigation.

Apartado 21747
Santo Domingo, Republica Dominicana
Tel. (809) 685 2111  FAX 685 2117
New York office: Tel. (212) 963 5684

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Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
It maintains a database with statistics and indicators on women for microcomputers. A diskette can be purchased.
New York NY 10017 USA
Tel. (212) 963 4939 Telex 963 4116

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
It was created in 1976 with the objective of providing support to projects on women: access to credit, training and technology.
New York, NY 10017 USA
Tel. (212) 906 5082 FAX 906 6705

United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
There is a special Gender in Development Program (GIDP). It promotes concrete actions to assure the participation of women in projects financed by the UNDP.
New York, NY 10017 USA
Tel. (212) 906 5082 FAX 906 5365

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
It has a special section on Women, Population and Development. It was established in 1969 and always assures that its programs and projects increase the opportunities for women's participation in development, decision-making, planning and community work. Since 1975 the UNFPA has become one of the bodies of the United Nations that gives directives on women's participation. It offers technical knowledge on the systematic integration of women's interests in all development programs.
220 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017
USA
Tel. (212) 297 5141 FAX 297 4095

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):
Section on Women in Development
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
USA
Tel. (212) 326 7000 FAX 888 7465

Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Refugees
High Level Coordinator for refugee women
Case postale 2500
CH-121
Geneva, Switzerland 2 Depot
Tel. (41)(22) 739 8111