



**“I Rise, I Rise and I Rise Again”
A Devotional Booklet**

**Prepared for the Ecumenical Team
attending
the 50th session of the
U.N. Commission on the Status of
Women,
February 27th- March 10th,
2006**



Ways to Use this Booklet for the sake of our ecumenical worship

(Music can be interspersed as you desire. Please bring the music with you; we are hoping we have musicians in and among us)

Call to Worship: (This can be a reading from this resource, can be a Psalm, can be a scriptural verse, can be a song, can be a prayer – use the theme to develop an opening declaration of God’s presence in our midst as we struggle in our human journey!)

Corporate Confession of Sin: (This should be based upon the theme of the day, what do we need to confess? – if you have trouble with writing these, the Chaplain would be more than willing to work with you – chaplain@gbgm-umc.org)

Words of Affirmation, absolution: (Can be a bible verse about forgiveness, etc.)

A Reading of a Psalm: (A poem would work here from this resource, if you desire)

The Lessons: (The lessons can be from current day reality, or from the resource booklet – they can combine with scripture in any creative way you desire)

The Prayers of the People: (This can be spontaneous from the women who are gathered, orchestrated or around a specific theme)

A Prayer of Thanksgiving: (This is a way of praising the maker anyway, use your words, assign someone to it)

Benediction: (This can be traditional or contemporary, extemporaneous or planned, this is a good word to send women forth into the work we need to do)

**Beijing Platform Goal: Institutional Mechanisms for the
Advancement of Women:
Monday, February 27
2000 years of bearing a burgeoning hope
for equality**

Galatians 3:28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Commentary from Bonnie Thurston¹, U.S.

“This letter (Galatians) is crucial in Christianity as one of the first statements of Gentile Christian theology and self-determination. It establishes that Gentiles need not be circumcised to be full members of the Christian community, that table fellowship is possible between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and that Christianity is, in fact, a universal religion in its own right apart from Jewish origins.

. . . .This remarkable statement (Galatians 3:28), which is taken by many scholars to be part of an early Christian baptismal liturgy, effectively sets aside ethnic, economic and gender boundaries of the Greco-Roman world. The equality and unity of men and women in the church, their “oneness in Christ Jesus,” is especially important in light of the larger issue in Galatians. If the church were to insist on circumcision as the requirement for full church membership, then women would be automatically excluded from full status in the community. Paul rejects an initiatory rite that systematically favors one group (males) and excludes another (female). This is particularly striking in a world in which male superiority over females was a “given”, especially in the religious sphere.

. . .while Gal. 3:28 is the one “principle” with special relevance to women, it should be noted that in this letter Paul makes special mention of the fact that God’s son was ‘born of a woman’ (4:4), refers to himself as the mother who is in the process of giving birth to the Galatian church (4:19) and uses the example of the matriarchs Sarah and Hagar to show the superiority of faith over law (4:21-31). Finally, in suggesting that the Christians in Galatia should use their freedom to become ‘slaves to one another’ (5:13), Paul is lifting up the traditionally female values of service as appropriate to all members of the church, both men and women.”

Questions: What institutions in your culture and country seem to inhibit women’s advancement. What is lost by such inhibitions, glass ceilings, roadblocks? What/Who benefits?

¹ Thurston, Bonnie. Women in the New Testament (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company) 1998. pp. 36-38.

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women: *In many countries, progress has been achieved in terms of creating ministries and other machineries to address advancement of women. Yet, there are still inadequate financial and human resources and a lack of political will and commitment to bringing women as full and equal partners into power structures at all levels. Women have been marginalized into Women's Ministries without really access to decision-making and power. Gender mainstreaming is still a misunderstood and underutilized concept in many parts of the world.*

Poem from Shakuntala Hawoldar, Mauritius²

You Have Touched my Skin

*You have touched my skin
Without entering my pores.
Do you know the sores inside
Festering in the dark womb of my mine?
But you have been content
To know me as an image
Sometimes as a caricature,
Scribbled in the corner of your newspaper
To make you laugh
You have known me
As your morning cup of tea
Without which your day could not have begun.
Or perhaps as a spoon to stir the
forgotten sugar at the bottom to sweetness.
Or just perhaps a pillow which you might use
If the nights of your past haunt you.
But the core of me, the hunger of me,
The thirst of me,
How would you have known?
For I have been losing
Myself in the smell of the kitchen steam
And the clatter of pans in the sink
Rising in the night to hush the child
While sleepless I watch for the first rays of light.*

Prayer

Holy and life-giving God, forgive us. Move us forward. Unburden the structures which keep your creations down. Help us unburden the lives of so many of those you love who buried beneath the oppressive weight of injustice are without the capacity to use the gifts

² In Chipasula, Stella and Frank. The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry. (Heinemann Publishers)1995. pg. 137.

you've granted for just such an hour as this. In the name of Jesus Christ who knew the structures that burdened women, the poor, the sick, the lonely, Amen.

Beijing Platform Goal: Human Rights of Women
Tuesday, February 28th
What does the Love of Christ have to do
with politics?

Read Luke 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment". When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured but not on the Sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years be set free from the bondage on this Sabbath day? When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Commentary from Helen Bruch Pearson³, U.S.

"The Bible is both a religious and a political book that speaks clearly about issues of justice and the fair treatment of every human being. The bent-over woman, whom Jesus healed on the Sabbath in the synagogue, helps us distinguish between justice and charity. In reading and discussing her story . . . we are confronted with the teachings of Jesus that seek to move our discipleship beyond acts of charity and into works of justice. . . .to make justice for all a reality instead of a forgotten dream is a single common struggle on the part of Christians everywhere. The affirmation that no one stands upright as long as others remain bent over is a way to critique, evaluate and judge structures and systems that manipulate, devalue and oppress other human beings. . . . Jesus felt no need to justify healing the infirmed woman nor his actions on the Sabbath. Instead, Jesus was compelled to confront an unjust institution and its laws that kept this woman in bondage, bent over and unfree. By his words and actions, Jesus indicated that there was no lasting health and wholeness until unjust leaders and institutions become just and equitable." When Jesus saw the bent-over woman, she became visible to others, including the persons in positions of authority and decision making. . . . But Jesus did more than notice her. He called her. He spoke to her even though the rabbinical law clearly stated that it was disreputable for a man to speak to any woman in public. . . . After Jesus called to

³ Pearson, Helen Bruch. Do What you have the Power to Do, (Nashville: Uppr Room Books) 1992, p. 55-57.

the bent-over woman and spoke words of freedom and healing, he reached out and laid his hands upon her. . . To bring about justice meant that hands had to be laid on the laws that perpetuated injustice. There had to be a willingness to get personally involved in changing the situation which had kept the woman bent over for eighteen years.”

Reflection from Rev. Marta Benavides, El Salvador

When I was growing up in El Salvador, the people always talked about the inhumane treatment of very impoverished peoples of the world, the very low wages paid by the enriched to the workers, to the day workers, coffee, cotton or sugar cane workers. Whole families had to go from place to place to eek out a minimal living. My mother protested about this all the time. In my country, even public school schedules were set-- and still is today--according to these calendars, the time to pick the fruits, since the whole family was involved, the kids would have to quit school to go work in the fields. . . But they still had to, because the parents would just have to move fast enough to catch a space.

In countries where machismo and sexism are so strong, there are many women head of families, so this is a great burden on them and on the children. The older children must pick too. In my family we were aware of how inhuman this was, and my parents--and most people , rebelled at the fact that the rich people were celebrating special religious times in their very own chapels. They could not understand why the church did not talk about that.

Once the people started to have strikes, they were brutally repressed by the military, who also had the bishop’s blessing. This is not human; it is inhuman the people would say.

In this type of inhuman conditions, the mistreatment to women and the denial to their rights is rampant.

- equal pay for equal work
- economic rights and access to own land-- one of the major problems for all peoples there-- , to financial benefits, to own a house,
- to decide over her destiny and that of her children,
- the right to specialized health services,

All these rights were denied as part of our culture.

But this is the picture the colonizers set forth when they set foot on our land. At that time in Europe, women were taught to be like children, thus unable to make decisions, not able to vote, nor own anything. It was assumed that having women attend university would be a waste of resources. Thus women were denied the financial, social and political benefits of such education. Yet, the task of creating homes of emotional and social stability which benefited all of society, including men, was the task of women. Women were required, for the sake of their own physical sustenance, to provide such homes. There was no choice but to provide men with a home space. That is why Virginia Wolfe wrote " *A Room of One's Own*"

When the colonizers came to our lands, they thought we were children, and thinking that children do not know how to think and had no rights, we were treated, worse than women were treated. They even had to figure out if we had souls, for if we did not, there was no need to evangelize us, for we did not have a soul to be saved. They thought of us as the "savages", but for them, that meant brutal and bad—They referred to us as "savage Indians". That way they had to have no human feeling towards us. So the treatment to our peoples and to women was akin to the violation of rape in all its expressions. We were not human, deserving of no human treatment. Ni wonder Galeano writes of "*The open veins of Latin America*", referring to all these facts. ---

It is in this inhuman thinking that the inhuman treatment or robbery of our lands, culture and spirituality has been based. Even now, we still have the same. Even when there is talk of forgiveness of the foreign debt, this inhuman historical robbery is not taken into account.

And guess what? After these inhuman conditions are created, when we are to receive aid, help, charitable organizations that "help" us get disturbed if we try to solve our own needs. Do you see?

Human rights is about the right to be human, and to be able to manifest our higher self, that is to be humane, and that goes for all aspects: creating society for all ages, inclusive of all, in the richness of our diversity and difference. We can not talk about human rights, without understanding that it is about creating societies that would enable each person to manifest all the gifts of the Spirit, that of God in each of us.

That is why human right's protections are so important; they are the framework in which each person is able to manifest such gifts as they have been given – the God within each one. Thus, we must affirm that women rights are human rights, that children rights are human rights, that indigenous rights are human rights, that workers rights are human rights, and not merely civil or political rights. We must affirm in our work that human rights are inherit to being

A life as a human being, thus, must not be earned, and can not be denied. But in order for these to come true, we must recognize the right of peoples to self determination, to development, to information(not propaganda), to recreation, to a healthy natural environment. For this to happen, we must affirm with our work the economic, ecological, social and cultural rights of peoples. We must be mindful and intentional about this. Churches and other religious organizations have the responsibility to work within these human and human rights frameworks, and governments must sign and abide by these conventions now. Thus the promotion of any entity that is based on community and cooperation, equality and the elimination of poverty and the all forms of discrimination such as the UN, the CEDAW optional protocol, the International Criminal Court and Agenda 21, with the conventions on Biodiversity, and the Kyoto protocol are key aspects of their frames or work.

Questions: What would it take for human rights protections to be taken seriously by the echelons of power? What is happening in your own country surrounding the human rights of women?

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on human rights of women: *Legal reforms have been undertaken to prohibit all forms of discrimination and discriminatory provisions have been eliminated in civil, penal and personal status law governing marriage and family relations, all forms of violence, women's property and ownership rights and women's political, work and employment rights. . . . However, Gender discrimination still faces many, many persons, and magnifies racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. . . CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) which is ratified by 179 countries, is not yet ratified by the U.S.*

Poem by Iyamide Hazeley, Sierra Leon parentage, lived in West Africa ⁴

Women of Courage

*There will be a morning song
for those who clean the dust
from the children's bruises
the blood of the wounds from bullets
those who wipe the sleep from the eyes of the weary
and whose labour shields
the frail bodies of the old
those whose pain is multiplied by the pleas of their young
scarred by the precision of their inquisitors
who refuse to retreat in battle
and who are dying with the sum of this knowledge
There will be a future.*

Prayer: *God of grace, for those facing inhumane treatment in any way, this day, we pray, we speak, we act. We let them touch us. We argue for them, for us. In the name of Jesus Christ, who knew intimately what inhumane treatment was and is. Amen.*

⁴ In Busby, Margaret. Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent From the Ancient Egyptian to the Present. 1992. pg. 906



Beijing Platform Goal: Women and Poverty

Wednesday, March 1

An upward glance from the bottom

Genesis 16:

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, "you see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her". And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived for ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her and she ran away from her. . . .The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him, and he shall live at odds with all his kin."

From Kwok Pui Lan, Hong Kong

"Ah Ching is a little girl who lives in a village in China. Her parents are hard-working peasants. Ah Ching's father likes the little girl but he wants to have a son. One night when Ah Ching was asleep, she suddenly felt a blanket being pulled over her and she could hardly breathe. She struggled and yelled: "Mama, Mama, help, help me!" To her amazement, she found that the one who tried to suffocate her was her father! She cried and prayed that her father would let her go and she promised to be a good girl. . . . Ah Ching was so afraid that when dawn broke, she escaped from the farm house and went to seek refuge with her old grandma. . . .When the grandma heard the story, she was so sad that tears began to run down her wrinkled cheeks. The night came, and grandma put Ah Ching to bed and comforted her. But at midnight, grandma summoned all her strength and with her trembling hands suffocated Ah Ching with an old blanket"

"China, overburdened with her one billion population, is determined to maintain a low birth-rate. A strict population control policy is implemented and couples are persuaded or coerced by various measures to have one child only. In the past, giving birth to a girl

was regarded as bad luck, but now having a girl means an end to the family's future. Ah Ching's mother prayed day and night for a boy and she wept bitterly when Ah Ching was born. These tears were cried for Ah Ching, for herself, for her family, and for the thousands of years of patriarchal tradition that still haunt people's minds after thirty years of socialist reconstruction and after the so-called Cultural Revolution. Many women in China and in Asia on similar occasions must have wept too. Sarah and Hannah back in the old days had also cried out to their God.

"Women are the poorest among the poor, the most voiceless among the oppressed, the most exploited. Sister Mary John Mananzan, in her study of sexual exploitation in a third world setting, lamented, "In an underdeveloped, exploited country, women tend to bear the burden of a double exploitation because of their sex." In the so-called "legalized prostitution area" in Jakarta, eight to ten girls live in one house. Behind the dining room, they have separate little compartments for doing their business. Each girl has a nice-looking photograph with her name on a board in the dining room. The customer comes in, looks at the photographs, picks one of them as if choosing something from the menu. Some of the girls in Thailand and in the Philippines have no names, they only wear a number." ⁵ .

"You ask me what shape feminist theology in Asia will take. Will it start with "beyond God the Father" and finish with "beginning from the other end"? Will it be coloured by the rhetoric of middle-class elites or heavily laden with socialist terminology? Will it yield a systematic analysis of the situation of women in Asia or just an emotional outburst like that of a lunatic? For these questions, I have no answer. I only know that feminist theology in Asia will be a cry, a plea and an invocation. It emerges from the wounds that hurt, the scars that do not disappear, the stories that have no ending. Feminist theology in Asia is not written with a pen, it is inscribed on the hearts of many who feel the pain, and yet dare to hope. ..." ⁶

Commentary by Elsa Tamez, Mexico⁷

"Generally, when church people speak of women in the Bible they choose to highlight famous women like Deborah, Esther the queen, Sarah, Mary. They never mention women slaves who were pagan, or poor, such as Hagar, the slave Sarah brought from Egypt. Hagar will be for traditional Bible study a negative model, because she became rebellious and wouldn't submit to Sarah's wishes. . . Our reading the stories of Sarah and Hagar, we generally identify ourselves with Sarah, the beautiful wife of the great patriarch Abraham, the father of the faith. We do this for two reasons. First, because the stories are so constructed as to lead the reader to such identification, and because Sarah's role is crucial in the history of Israel. Second, because the story continually emphasizes the submission of workers, and the attitude of Sarah towards Hagar appears quite natural .

⁵ Lan, Kwok Pui "God Weeps with Our Pain," in Pobee, John S. and Von Wartenberg-potter, Barbel eds. New Eyes for Reading: biblical and theological reflections by women from the third world. (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC) 1986, p. 90-1

⁶ Lan, Kwok Pui. Ibid. p. 90.

⁷ Tamez, Elsa. "The Woman who complicated Salvation History", in Pobee, John S. and Von Wartenberg-potter, Barbel eds. New Eyes for Reading: biblical and theological reflections by women from the third world. (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC) 1986. p. 5-17

Right at the beginning we must recognize these two elements, and consciously distance ourselves from them, in order to read the text, or perhaps reconstruct it, from the perspective of third world women . . . This incident, which does not appear strange to domestic workers today, happened thousands of years ago, during the third dynasty of Ur, and the twelfth Egyptian dynasty. . . . Everything was well planned for Abraham and Sarah, but a woman and her son broke into the story, complicating it. Who was Hagar? . . . Hagar is a slave in the service of Sarah. . . Only fairly wealthy couples kept slaves. Abraham and Sarah were a wealthy couple and considered their wealth as a gift from God, a common Hebrew attitude” (from here, follows an interpretation from God’s attention to Hagar – whereby God’s address to Hagar in the desert is described as an “annunciation”) . . Ms Tamez concludes with: “The poor complicate the history of salvation. But God’s action on their behalf teaches us that we should reconstruct this well-known history. “

Questions:

Who benefits from low levels of political participation by impoverished people?
Who benefits from keeping poor women poor?⁸ What laws are in place in your country in order to provide some economic, social and political ground for those women who through their role in the world do not have access to financial capital?

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on women and poverty: *Considerable progress has been achieved in increasing awareness that there is a gender dimension to poverty and in the recognition that gender equality is one of the factors for eradicating poverty. . . However, despite some gains for some women, there is a widening economic inequality between women and men, child care burden is on women . . excessive military spending creates havoc for women . . and there's simply a lack of will.*

Poem from Agnes Chepkwony, Abuom⁹

The Story of Women

The story of women and economic justice
is a story of life and death
A story about endless agonies
A story about managing the unmanageable
A story of endless hours of work and toil
A story of sleepless nights
A story of destitution, squalor and neglect
A story of hearing about policies
that determine our lives but never being there to participate
A story of the voiceless and the powerless
A story of trials and temptations

⁸ Pearson, Helen Bruch. *Do What you have the Power to Do*, (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1992) p. 70

⁹ "Women Standing Up to Adjustment in Africa." A report of the African Women's Economic Policy Network. July 1996. accessed 4/13/99. <<http://www.igc.apc.org/dgap/awepon.html>>

A story of lost personalities and dignity
A story of survival behind battle fronts
as women and children flee bomb raids
A story of structural, emotional and physical violence
A story of struggle and humiliation
A story of dreams and visions unfulfilled
A story of hope
A story of combat and resistance
A story of withdrawal from structures of exploitation
A story of innovation and creativity
A story of breaking new frontiers for survival
A story of a heroic people marching to
the future with new alternatives for
the survival of the human race

--

Prayer using the words of Musimbi Kanyoro, Kenya: ¹⁰

*God of heaven and earth, God of great mercy and compassion, God who knows me
better than I know myself –*

*“Sarah and Hagar are not biblical women for me.
They are my family.*

I have lived in the middle of their struggle all my life.

I am part of their fights day in and day out.

I am not able to see one as more responsible than the other . . .

I see envy, jealousy, revenge, competition and many more ugly things.

*I am not looking for models of behavior but rather for clues as to what might change
behavior*

Prayer: *Gracious God, find within me what needs to be changed; that which keeps the
impoverished, impoverished Help me articulate both my complaint and my
confession. May I march with my sister, eat with my sister, create and innovate a new
world with my sisters. There’s too much at stake. And in this way may we bring light
into the darkness, the strength of your love into real time, and the conviction of truth. . .
For all of our sakes. In the name of Jesus Christ, who entered this world and spoke of
the riches of poverty and the poverty of riches, we pray, Amen.*

¹⁰ Kanyoro, Musimbi. “Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Contribution”. In Ortega, Ofelia, eds. Women’s Visions: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action. (Geneva: WCC)1995, p. 23.

Beijing Platform Goal: Women in Power and Decision making

Thursday, March 2

Power only sees what it wants to see

From the book of Matthew: *After Jesus had been born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod the king, wise men came to Jerusalem from the East inquiring: "Where is the one born king of the Jews? We have seen his star and have come to pay homage". Herod heard and was disturbed, and all of Jerusalem with him. Assembling some scribes and priests of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ would be born. "In Bethlehem of Judea, as the prophet foretold, 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah: from you will come a leader to govern Israel.'" Herod summoned the wise men secretly to ascertain when the star had appeared, then sent them on, saying, "Search for the child, and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may pay homage." Having heard the king they went their way, following the star until it came to rest: and they entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they paid him homage, then opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, and frankincense and myrrh. They were warned in a dream to avoid Herod, and returned to their country by a different way. Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying "Rise, take the child and his mother and flee, for Herod intends to destroy him." So he took the child and his mother and fled to Egypt. When Herod realized the wise men were gone and he had been tricked, he was livid with rage and had all the male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and the surrounding region slaughtered, fulfilling the words of Jeremiah the prophet: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing; Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they were no more." After Herod's death, the angel of God appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Rise, take the child and his mother and return to Israel, for those who would kill the child are dead.' So, he rose and took the child and his mother and returned to Israel. On learning that Archelaus had succeeded Herod his father as ruler of Judea, Joseph was afraid to go there. He was warned in a dream and they settled in Galilee in a town called Nazareth, so the words of the prophet might be fulfilled. "he shall be called a Nazarene"*

Miriam Therese Winter suggests the following questions:

What do you think is implied in the references to women in this story?

What information is communicated in the references to men?

What do you think is the point of the story?

How do you feel about the story and its traditional interpretation?

Commentary from Miriam Therese Winter, U.S.¹¹

¹¹ Winter, Miriam Therese Winter. Woman Prayer, Woman Song – Resources for Ritual (Oak Park: Mayer Stone Books, 1987) p. 84-86

The men in the story, and there are many, have typical masculine roles, positions of power, positions of prestige, with titles or descriptive phrases bound to impress and all the trappings appropriate to the culturally privileged class . . .

The women – there are only two – are subordinate or invisible: one is silent the other weeps. Power sees what it wants to see.”

Question: What silences women? Are you aware of that which silences you in your own life moving you outside the boundaries of the decisions that need to be made in your family, your life, your work? Who’s making the decisions? Where is your country lacking in enabling women’s voices in the arena of power and decision-making? At the family level? At the town level? At the advocacy level? At the educational level? At the national level?

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals women in power and decision making: *There has been a growing acceptance of the importance to society of the full participation of women in decision-making at all levels and in all forums, including the intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental sectors. In some countries, women have also attained higher positions in these spheres. However, the actual participation of women at the highest levels of national and international decision making has not significantly changed since the time of the IVth World conference on Women in 1995. Women continue to be underrepresented.*

Prayer by Julia Esquivel, Chile¹²:

*You illuminate our darkness
And fill our sadness
With hope.*

*Because you are stronger than I,
I have let myself be a captive,
And your love burns in my heart.*

*The thirst for your truth
Has made me a pilgrim
From city to city
Until the day your Word
Is fulfilled,
And we are reborn
In your image and likeness*

*Captivate me, Lord
Till the last of my days,
Wring out my heart
With your hands,
Of a wise old Indian,*

¹² Esquivel, Julia. Threatened with Resurrection. Prayers and Poems from an Exiled Guatemalan. (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press), 1982. p. 43

*So that I will not forget
Your Justice
Nor cease proclaiming
The urgent need
For humankind
To live in harmony.*

Beijing Platform Goal: Women in Armed Conflict

Friday, March 3, 2006

How far do we religious sorts yet need to travel within our own institutions?

Women's World Day of Prayer

Deuteronomy 21:10-14

Suppose you go to war against your enemies and the LORD your God hands them over to you and you take captives. And suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you are attracted to her and want to marry her. If this happens, you may take her to your home, where she must shave her head, cut her fingernails, and change all her clothes. Then she must remain in your home for a full month, mourning for her father and mother. After that you may marry her. But if you marry her and then decide you do not like her, you must let her go free. You may not sell her or treat her as a slave, for you have humiliated her.

Commentary by Rev. Kathleen Stone, Chaplain, Church Center for the U.N., U.S.

Buried within the Mosaic code, there is no way to relate to such a text in any other way than realizing that from time immemorial and even into today's time, women are victims of war in gender specific and devastating ways. The above text is encoded within the "National Law" of the Israelites. There is no way to interpret this but for what it is. This is a reality of our history and its Biblical record and its assumed voice from the mouth of God lends standardization and legalization and even deification to such behavior.

Commentary from Rev. Marta Benavides, Founder, the XXIII Century, El Salvador

In Spanish, the word "Colonialism" comes from the same root as Columbus – "colon". Coming myself from a country where we have been subjected to domination by force or "conquest" --- through the use of arms, repression, oppression and finally, "colonization" which is the consequence of such actions. --- our culture, language, understandings, spirituality were indigenous but foreign culture language and religion were imposed upon us. I know first hand what armed conflict is and who benefits by it. We were made slaves to a foreign people; women were raped, men were murdered, and the whole "mestizaje" of our race and culture resulted from armed the conquest and colonialization

process. For us, armed conflict carried forth by western "civilization", justified and promoted by the Church --has been abortive and has denied us of our very being. The worst is that we have internalized colonialism in all of its manifestations.

Life, in its essence, provides us with experiences and opportunities which we call conflicts, but which allow us to reflect, to grow, to choose to build community, to choose to respond with love and understanding, allowing each one to meet ourselves, and to grow in our understandings of higher manifestations of the self, in community, choosing the common good. But armed conflict--- or War is about imposition, by the force of arms that today even includes nuclear arms. This is truly abortion -- armed conflict and war -- for it corrupts [the good] life and those values inherent in life given to us by a good Creator, and justifies crime, violence against oneself and another.

In the NY times we have seen the pictures of women in Darfur, Sudan with babies -- babies who are the consequence not of a loving, supportive familial relationship but from violent rape by invading armed forces. We are told of the oppressive treatment that these children and their mothers will face in society. In Bosnia, we saw the same thing; women forced into prostitution, into forced pregnancy, raped; all these as acts of war. The same was true of those named "comfort women" during the WWI. These women were the Japanese, Korean and Filipino Women kidnapped to serve as prostitutes to Japanese soldiers. We have heard in recent days the situation for some men, but especially women and girls in Iraq. We lived through this kind of conflict in El Salvador during the "armed conflict" of the 80s; there we experienced the terrible rape and murders of women. We knew of US nuns and the missionary who were brutally raped and murdered there in December 1980. And then, of course there were the crusades.

This is why we must see and commit to live by the understanding that there is no way to peace, that peace is the way. That is why in the context of the totality of history, women got together and were able to demonstrate, as they systematized their experiences throughout the world and throughout history--that RAPE is a crime against humanity -- specifically experienced mostly by women -- and thanks to that systemization, the now recently established International Criminal Court-ICC, includes gender justice as an aspect of crimes against humanity, and a crime of war.

The church and all religions must recognize this history and work to create societies that guarantee human rights for the sake of the life that the Creator has endowed and desired for us. This is why we must educate about the fact that women rights are human rights. The work of the church must enable its members to be humane, not just human beings. This is today's call.

Questions: In your country, is rape by the armed forces talked about in the echelons of power, the court systems, as a national or international priority? Why/Why not?

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on women and armed conflict: *Steps have been taken to understand the destructive impact of armed conflict on women. A gender-sensitive approach to the application of*

international human rights law and international humanitarian law is essential. Through the work of International Tribunals which have begun to codify international law for and the codification able to begin through the establishment of the International Criminal Court, rape is now considered a crime against humanity and a war crime. This is progress. However, despite increasing law, the violations of the human rights of women continue. There has been an increase in reporting of all forms of violence against women, including sexual slavery, rape, systematic rape, sexual abuse and forced pregnancies in situations of armed conflict.

In addition, however, peace is inexorably linked to the equality between women and men and their social and economic development. . The targeting of civilians, including women and children, the displacement of people and the recruitment of child soldiers all contribute to women's poverty. Excessive military expenditures, including global military expenditures, trade in arms and investment for arms production, direct the allocation of funds away from social and economic development, in particular for the advancement of women.

Poem by Abena P.A. Busia, Ghana, daughter of late Ghanaian Prime Minister, Kofi Busia¹³

Liberation

*We are all mothers,
and we have that fire within us,
of powerful women
whose spirits are so angry
we can laugh beauty into life
and still make you taste
the salty tears of our knowledge-
For we are not tortured
anymore;
we have seen beyond your lies and disguises,
and we have mastered the language of words,
we have mastered speech
And know
we have also seen ourselves raw
and naked piece by piece until our flesh lies flayed
with blood on our own hands.
What terrible thing can you do us
which we have not done to ourselves?
What can you tell us
which we didn't deceive ourselves with
a long time ago?
You cannot know how long we cried
until we laughed
over the broken pieces of our dreams.*

¹³ Chipasula, Stella and Frank. The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry. 1995.pg. 53

*Ignorance
shattered us into such fragments
we had to unearth ourselves piece by piece,
to recover with our own hands such unexpected relics
even we wondered
how we could hold such treasure.
Yes, we have conceived
to forge our mutilated hopes
into the substance of visions
beyond your imaginings
to declare the pain of our deliverance:
So do not even ask,
do not ask what it is we are labouring with this time;
Dreamers remember their dreams
when they are disturbed-
And you shall not escape
what we will make
of the broken pieces of our lives,*

Prayer: *God of life, we kneel before you in order that we might stand up again, straighter, in order that we might find those places on this earth where we can advocate for a life of our visions. Strengthen, encourage, and guide our words and actions today so that we might be fully imbued with your Spirit for the life of ourselves and our sisters and ultimately, our brothers around the world. In the name of Jesus Christ who knew the power of occupying forces to destroy a community, we pray. Amen.*

Beijing Platform Goal: The education and training of women

Monday, March 6

**What happens to the smart ones?
The insidious nature of closed minds**

John 4:5-14

On his way through Samaria, Jesus came to the town of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to Joseph, his son. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down beside the well. A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into town to buy food. The woman replied, "You, a Jew, are asking me, A Samaritan, for a drink?" Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied, if you only knew what God has to give, and who it is that asks for a drink, you would have asked of him instead and he would have given you living water." The woman answered, "you have no bucket, and the well is deep. How can you get this living water? Are you greater than Jacob, who gave us this well, and drank from it, with his sons and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Whoever drinks this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks the water that I shall give will never thirst again; for the water I give becomes a spring within, welling up to eternal life."

Commentary by Bonnie Thurston¹⁴, U.S.:

“The Samaritan woman is, in fact, one of the most theologically informed persons in the Fourth Gospel. She knows the regulations about ritual purity (v. 9), ancestral traditions of Israel (v. 12), the necessity to worship at a valid temple (v.19-20), and the expectations of a Messiah (v. 25). She is, in short, conversant in Samaritan theology which is not surprising since, unlike Jews, Samaritans educated religiously both male and female children. Jesus takes her seriously as a discussion partner as he did Nicodemus in the preceding chapter. . . Is she really a woman of loose morals (as is the traditional interpretation?) If she were, when she returned to her village to share her new-found knowledge of Jesus, would she have received a hearing? Would the Samaritans have taken seriously the witness of a strumpet?”

Question: Who benefits from an interpretation that a woman who was most likely quite educated, who spoke her mind – a woman who had such presence and confidence to speak with a Hebrew man -- despised by her culture -- in broad daylight -- is a woman of disrepute? How is this continued today in your country's culture?

¹⁴ Thurston, Bonnie. Women in the New Testament (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), p. 83-4

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on education and training of women

Although statistics regarding the education of girls is promising, in some places, education for girls is still not even remotely available. Awareness is increasing governmentally on the importance of educating and training young girls, but there is often a lack of committed resources, due to insufficient political will and commitment. Statistics from the UNICEF, "State of the World's Children 2005," reveal the following statistics.

In developing countries: 72% of females and 76% of males attend primary school.

In least developed countries: 56% of females and 61% of males attend primary school

And, worldwide: 72% of females and 76% of males attend primary school.



In the adult world, adult literacy is recorded as follows:

Developing countries 81% of males and 66% of females

In Least Developed Countries, 62% of males and 42% of females

And, worldwide, 85% of males and 74% of females.¹⁵

A Poem by Shumirai Makasa, Zimbabwe¹⁶

A Girl is a Child Too

Father, let me go to school too

Even though I am a girl

You never know where fortune lies

Children are the same everywhere.

Father let me go to school too

To learn, like the others do

A person's livelihood depends on education

And a girl is a person too.

Father let me go to school too

Accept me the way I am

You refer to a boy as a child

Even me you call a child

So treat all children the same.

Father, let me go to school too

Without education I am useless

Tomorrow you will regret

A girl is a person too

Please let me go to school.

¹⁵ See: http://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/Table5_E.xls

¹⁶ Getecha, Ciru and Chipika, Jesimen. Zimbabwe Women's Voices. (World Conference on Women: Beijing) 1995. pg. 35.

Prayer inspired by Edwina Gately, U.S..¹⁷

*I have been called, Lord God
To become
No one is called to be who I am called to be.
It does not matter if I am short or tall
Or thickset or slow.
It does not matter
If I sparkle with life
Or are silent as a still pool,
Whether I sing my song aloud
Or weep alone in the darkness.
It does not matter
Whether I feel loved and admired
Or unloved and alone,
For I am called
To become
Perfect
A perfect creation.
No one's shadow
Should cloud my becoming.
No one's light
Should dispel my spark.
For God delights in me.
Jealously God looks upon me
And encourages with gentle joy
Every movement of the Spirit
Within me.*

*I have been called, Lord God
May I respond today, this moment.*

¹⁷ Inspired by Gateley, Edwina, Psalms of a LayWoman. (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward) 1999, p. 67-8.

Beijing Platform Goal: Women and the media
Tuesday, March 7
What's the message on the big screen?

Mark 5:25-35

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had; and was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well". Immediately her hemorrhage stopped: and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?" He looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Commentary from Helen Bruch Pearson, U.S.:

The woman with the uncontrollable hemorrhage suffered for twelve years under the weight of the levitical purity laws. She knew what it was like to be unable to escape unjust laws. The stigma that her religion and society hurled against her was oppressive and dehumanizing

Although a culture may "not have overt blood taboos. . . . the superstition of uncleanliness is still attached to a woman's menstrual cycle. We let manufacturers and commercials decide what is 'unclean' for the rest of society and religion. A multimillion dollar marketing (U.S.) campaign that encourages women to wear "protection", not just during "that certain time of the month but every day, is echoed on television and radio. It is blasted on billboards everywhere. A woman's well-being is somehow hinged to using the plethora of feminine hygiene supplies that assure cleanness. The subtle message is that not only is a woman unclean during her menstrual cycle, she is unclean every day. The success of this marketing campaign lies in convincing women that a normal and natural bodily function is unclean and that tampons and pads can hide her "uncleanness".¹⁸

Questions: What laws in your country are protecting women from degrading representations and degrading their experience? What about this is inhumane? What is it about women's voices in the power and decision-making of media representation is so essential? Why?

¹⁸ Pearson. Ibid. Page 101-2.

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on women and the media: *The establishment of local, national and international women's media networks has contributed to global information dissemination, exchange of views and has helped support women's groups active in media work. However, negative, violent and degrading images of women, including pornography and stereotyped portrayals have increased in different forms using new powerful communication technologies. The bias against women remains in the media.*

Poem, Hymn—words by Cecil Frances Alexander, 1848:

*All things Bright and beautiful
All creatures great and small
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.*

*Each little flower that opens
Each little bird that sings,
God made their glowing colors,
And made their tiny wings.*

*The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun
The ripe fruits in the garden
God made them every one.*

*God gave us eyes to see them
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty
Who has made all things well.*

Prayer: *God of grace, may we who have lips to tell reveal such loving creation across the world in a way that gives justice to your creation and which does not degrade any part of it. In the name of Jesus Christ, who knew both the good news and the degradation that can happen through the public word, we pray, Amen.*

Beijing Platform Goal: Women's Health

WEDNESDAY, March 8

Who do we follow? What do we say? From whence do we come?

Luke 8:1-4

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza and Susanna and many others, who provided for them, out of their resources.

Commentary by Renita Weems¹⁹

“Although many people have supposed that the sinner who anointed Jesus’ feet with her hair and tears (Luke 7) was Mary Magdalene, we have no reason to believe that the anointer and Mary Magdalene are the same woman. Mary Magdalene is not introduced by name until the next chapter (above), where all we are told specifically about her is that, before she met Jesus, she had been plagued with demons (Luke 8:2). . . . In those days people believed in spiritual beings, both good ones and bad ones. Those who proffered goodwill were considered angels, and those which proffered evil, demons. As such, mental disorders were believed to be manifestations of demonic spirits. . . . In Mary, it is told, there were seven demons to be exact. . . . We do not know the specific nature of Mary Magdalene’s illness; however, we do know that once she was healed, Mary proved to be an able leader among the woman: articulate, loyal and persuasive. And because, once she was healed she was so charismatic, it is not far-fetched to suppose that at least some of Mary’s illness was brought on by her inability to express herself fully. That could be attributed to the lifestyle she was forced to live because she was a woman in first-century Palestine. . . . Imagine: Here was an otherwise gifted, intelligent, bright, charismatic woman living in a society which had no place for gifted, intelligent, bright charismatic women. Like many women today, Mary’s emotional and physical infirmities were probably symptomatic of the stresses she was forced to live through on a daily basis: stresses and strains that came in the form of relationships and environments that were neither affirming nor encouraging; stresses that were, in fact, repressive and destructive.”

¹⁹ Weems, Renita. Just a Sister Away: A Womanist vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988), p. 89

Questions: What active research and funding is coming from your country's priorities to the gender specific needs of women and the health of their minds and bodies?

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on health

Awareness has increased, and some health programs that cover all aspects of women's health throughout a women's life cycle have been implemented. Yet, the gap between rich and poor countries with regards to infant mortality and maternal mortality and morbidity rates as well as reproductive health problems, HIV/AIDS, endemic infectious and communicable diseases remain unacceptably wide. Absence of holistic health care for women and girls, lack of access to clean water continues to plague the health of all persons, yet for those who child bear and child rear, this lack of access has extremely significant ramifications. Even in rich countries, such as the U.S. -- 'it has been reported that the National Institute of Health, the U.S. government's largest funding organ for medical research, had spent only about 13 percent of its total budget on women's health issues.

Questions: Who benefits from by not supporting the gender specific nature of women's physical AND mental health issues? What is swept under the rug and silenced or ignored? Why?

Prayer from Kate McIlbagga, Scotland²⁰

*Let silence be placed around us,
Like a mantle,
Let us enter into it,
As through a small secret door;
Stooping,
To emerge into
An acre of peace,
Where stillness rings
And the voice of God
Is ever present.*

*The voice of God
In the startled cry
Of a refugee child,
Waking
In unfamiliar surroundings.
The voice of God
In the mother,
Fleeing with her treasure
In her arms, who says,
"I am here."
The voice of God*

²⁰ Furlong, Monica, ed. Women Pray. (Woodstock, VT: Skylights Publishing) 2002, p. 80-81.

*In the father
Who points to the stars and says:
'there is our signpost
there is our lantern. Be of good courage.'*

*O Lord, may the mantle of silence
Become a cloak of understanding
To warm our hearts in prayer.*

Beijing Platform Goal: Women and Violence
THURSDAY, March 9
It's a long walk from here to there
But, we're together

From the Book of Judges 19

In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a Levite who lived in Ephraim took as his concubine a woman from Bethlehem. One day, in anger, she left him and returned to her father's house. After four months had passed, her husband set out to fetch her and bring her back. His father-in-law greeted him joyfully and invited him to stay awhile. He ate and drank and spent the night and after three days prepared to leave, but his father-in-law insisted he stay a little longer. The fourth day passed, and the fifth day; then finally, toward evening, determined to delay no longer he set out with his donkeys and his concubine and his servant. As they drew near to Jerusalem, his servant said, "Master, let us spend the night." "Not here, in a town of foreigners", he replied. "Let us continue



on to Gibeah and tarry among Israelites." They reached Gibeah as the sun was setting but no one offered them hospitality, so they sat down in the public square. An old man, returning from the fields, not a native of Gibeah but a sojourner from Ephraim who had settled in the town, saw the travelers and stopped to inquire: "Where have you come from? Where are you going? " "We are on our way

from Bethel in Judah to Ephraim, my home, but no one has offered us shelter for the night. We have enough provisions, straw for the donkeys, and bread and wine". The old man answered, "Shalom! Come with me. I will see to all your needs. You cannot spend the night out here in the public square." So he took them home, where they washed their feet and were made comfortable. As they were at table, men from the town, abusive and drunk, surrounded the house and beat on the door, demanding that the guest be sent out to them that they might have sex with him. The old man pleaded, "My brothers, no, this man is my guest, do not commit this crime. Here is my daughter, a virgin, a child; I will give her over to you. Enjoy her, do what you please with her, but do not violate the man." The men would not listen, they were out of control; so the Levite, the guest, took his concubine and brought her out to them. They raped her, savagely, again and again, abusing her until morning. At daybreak, they let her go, and she fell at the threshold of the old man's house and lay there without moving. When the sun was up, her husband arose, and opened the door, prepared to continue his journey. Seeing her, he said, "Get up! We must go." She was silent. She was dead. He laid her across his donkey and journeyed to his home. When he reached his house, he took a knife and dissected his concubine, limb by limb, cut her up into twelve pieces, and sent her mutilated body throughout Israel. He instructed his messengers to say to the people: "Has any man seen such a thing from the time of the Exodus until now? Reflect on this, discuss it,, then

tell me what you decide.” All who saw it said, “Never! Never has such a thing been done, never has such a thing been seen since the time of the Exodus.”

Commentary from Miriam Therese Winter²¹, U.S.

We have just heard a biblical story and we have been taught that the Bible is the word of God. How do you feel about what you heard? What could be the point of such a story in which women are devalued and physically abused? Is there any meaning here for us and for the times in which we live?

Commentary from Phyllis Trible²², U.S.

”At the beginning, the narrator introduces the two main characters through polarities of sex, status, and geography. “A man, a Levite sojourning in the remote hill country of Ephraim” opposes “a woman, a concubine from Bethlehem of Judah”. Structurally, these descriptions correspond. Man and Woman are parallel identifications. The remote and unspecified hill country of Ephraim in the north balances the accessible and familiar town of Bethlehem in the south. Similarly, the middle terms, Levite and concubine, match. Yet their meaning poses striking dissonance. A Levite has an honored place in society that sets him above many other males; a concubine has an inferior status that places her beneath other females. Legally and socially, she is not the equivalent of a wife but is virtually a slave, secured by a man for his own purposes. The grammar and syntax of this opening sentence exploit the inequality. He is subject; she, object. He controls her. How he acquired her we do not know; that he owns her is certain.”

Commentary by Musimbi Kanyoro, Kenya

“The women at the Vienna conference (World Conference on Human Rights 1993), worked very hard to put women’s human rights on the agenda, and we succeeded. At the daily women’s caucuses, we struggled to maintain a united front on the universality issue (the universality of human rights vs. human rights as culturally determined) because we saw so many possibilities of using culture to explain away the violation of women’s rights. We were greatly helped by the current worldwide awareness of how violence against women defies all borders of culture, race, geography and class. Media coverage of the horrendous use of rape in the former Yugoslavia was also a fresh memory I recall a presentation made by Nashilogo Elago, a Namibian woman, in a workshop in Bossey in 1988. She said many black women in Namibia had been raped by white occupying soldiers from South Africa. When the women took the matter to the courts, they were told that it was not a serious issue because, culturally, black people enjoy sex and African women are used to rough treatment in their homes. Later, I met this kind of thinking again when a missionary doctor stopped in Geneva to brief the ecumenical organizations during the terrible early days of the Liberian war. After telling of the horrible killings and looting, he spoke of the widespread rape of women, which no media reports had mentioned. In the discussion which followed, some of us focused on the

²¹ Winter, Miriam Therese. Woman Prayer Woman Song: Resources for Ritual. P. 145-7

²² Trible, Phyllis. Texts of Terror. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984)

question of how to help these women. The missionary doctor replied that he saw no possible traumatic effects of rape on them.

Questions: Who benefits from such crude interpretations of women's experience and lack of justice for such violence against women? Where is this crude interpretation manifested in your country's priorities found within your courts of justice and present legislative priorities?

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on women and violence *Although it is widely accepted that violence against women and girls whether in public or private life is a violation of women's human rights, women continue to be the victims of violence all over the world. "Honor killings, female genital mutilation, Sati, the pledging of young children to be concubines or sex slaves, are examples of the type of practices that continue to shock the conscience because they involve physical violence and brutality" yet, these practices are legitimized by religious, cultural and social norms.*²³ *There is a lack of comprehensive programs which deal effectively with educating for protection of women, or the prevention or prosecution of the perpetrators. Women's subordinate economic opportunities make them prone to being victims of violence. "The absence of adequate gender-disaggregated data and statistics on the incidence of violence makes the elaboration of programmes and monitoring of changes difficult. Lack of or inadequate documentation and research on domestic violence, sexual harassment and violence against women and girls in private and in public, including the workplace, impede efforts to design specific intervention strategies"*²⁴.

Psalm 24 (version by Stephen Mitchell), U.S.²⁵

*The earth belongs to the Lord,
And everything on it is God's.
For God founded it in empty space
And breathed the life-breath into it,
Filling it with manifold creatures
Each one precious in God's sight.*

*Who is fit to hold power
And worthy to act in God's place?
Those with a passion for the truth,
Who are horrified by injustice,*

²³ Comments of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences to the Human Rights Commission*, April 10, 2002
<http://www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/666287371B6485B1C1256BA0004AADF5?opendocument>

²⁴ Found in *FWCW Platform for Action Violence against women*, paragraph 120.
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm>

²⁵ Roberts, Elizabeth and Elias Amidon. *Life Prayers from around the World: Affirmations to celebrate the Human Journey*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins), 1996., p. 114.

*Who act with mercy to the poor
And take up the cause of the helpless,
Who have let go of selfish concerns
And see the whole earth as sacred
Refusing to exploit her creatures
Or to foul her waters and lands.
Their strength is in their compassion;
God's light shines through their hearts.
Their children's children will bless them
And the work of their hands will endure.*

Prayer: *Holy and life Giving God, all we have is yours. Do not let us squander, waste and do violence to anything that lives. Teach us. Rebuke us. Hold us accountable. Forgive us. Love us. In the embrace of Jesus, the Christ who knew the violence of humankind. Amen.*

Beijing Platform Goal: Women and the Economy
FRIDAY, March 10
Keep on, Keep on, dear sisters
In every place and time; work with
whoever you can

Read Acts: 13-15

On the Sabbath we (Paul and his traveling companions) went outside the city gate to the river where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Commentary by Rev. Margaret Rose, Director of Women's Programs, the Episcopal Church, U.S.

Though Lydia may have been the exception rather than the rule, she was clearly a woman of means. Likely, she was unmarried or a widow, a head of household whose resources and sense of self worth permitted her to invite, indeed persuade Paul and his companions to stay at her house. The Biblical witness of women who used their economic and social power in the world of business and in their households counteracts those biblical interpretations which insist that women remain silent and passive. Lydia claimed her power. And in that claiming she offers women of faith a witness for their own economic and social empowerment.

Women have always been part of the economy with the labor of household work, care of families, often assisting in business and financial matters. But all too often that labor has gone unrecognized, the economic power it represents subsumed by established patriarchal structures. Lydia and many women after her open the way for women's open participation in all areas of public life.

Commentary by Peggy Andrews, U.S.

"It was a warm, sunny November day in 1990 when Young Shin, a Korean lawyer and cofounder of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) took me to see the space where the seamstresses work. I had helped Shin and the staff of AIWA to secure a grant from the church agency where I worked. Many women in the U.S. work under conditions similar to those found in developing countries. Many of them are immigrants from developing countries. . . As we peered through the bars of the door, we could hear the hum of a small fan and the thrummm of the sewing machines, but no voices. The fan

did little to circulate the dusty stale air in the room, which had sealed windows. The haze in the air from the lint gave a bluish tone to the dim light coming through the dirt-covered windows. It wasn't long before my nose began to feel dry . . . Cloth was piled high on the tables, the floor and the window sills. Women were bending over the machines. I could almost feel their backs hurting – it must be hard to sleep at night. Just as we were leaving to go up to the next floor a man yelled at us to “get away and leave my women alone!” For many of these women, the contractors do own them, do have complete control over their work lives. The women are not free to organize unions. If they voice any complaints they are fired and put on a nonhiring list.”²⁶

Questions: What is really happening with women and their economic contributions, their ability to be a part of the economic system? Around the world how are the people organized for the current economic patterns? Where do the majority of women fit in -- even, some would say, for the sake of economic progress? What must we do in our laws, our processes to change such a pattern?

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on women and the economy *Despite an increase in participation of women in the labor market, many women with comparable skills and experience are confronted with a gender wage gap and lag behind men in income and career mobility in the formal sector. Equal pay for women and men for equal work, or work of equal value, has not yet been fully realized.*

Prayer from the Anglican Church in Kenya²⁷

*Creator God, our heavenly Father,
Your Son was a carpenter in Nazareth:
We pray for all those who labor
In our factories and shops.
Grant them wisdom and honesty, strength and skill
To provide for themselves
And for the needs of our country.
Look with compassion on the landless poor,
The unemployed and homeless
The orphans and the hungry,
And grant us your power to work towards justice
In transforming their lives for your glory;
Through our risen Lord Jesus Christ
Who had nowhere to lay his head.
Amen.*

²⁶ Andrews, Peggy. Sisters Listening to Sisters: Women of the World Share their Stories of Personal Empowerment. (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey) 1996. p. 39

²⁷ In Webber, Christopher, Give Us Grace (London: Morehouse Publishing) 2004, p.485.

Beijing Platform Goal: The Girl Child
to go home with
FOR THE YOUNG ONES

Luke 1:26-28

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendent of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greeting, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

A letter from Jonella²⁸

Jonella was 12 years old. She was a victim of oppressive circumstances: inadequate health care, improper diet, poverty, racism and child abuse. . . Helen Pearson spent many hours sitting next to her in the classroom. One day, a hug came. This letter then followed.



Dear Mrs. Pereson.

I no you like buterflys and rainbos. Now I like them to. When you came to my room no budy ever talked to me or nuthin. Nobudy choze me. Nobudy tuhced me. No budy called me by name. I was invisible to most everbudy, but you. You sat with me close in my seat. You talked with Me not past me. You tuhced me. It felt good to have sumone hug me when you say my name I'm not invzible anymore. I'm me! I didn't understand about buterflys and rainbos at furst but now I do. My heart has helped open my eyes. I see buterflys and rainbos lots of places now. I even feel safe to tell you I love you. Jonella.

Questions: Why does God come to Mary, a “mere” teenager? Why not the “tried and true” ? If not having a heavenly father was so important, why not a heavenly mother? What does Mary have that’s necessary? What unique gifts do girls bring to the table? What laws in your country are in place to protect girls from ways that minds which value boys more than girls?

Progress made and challenges remaining for the realization of Beijing goals on the girl child:

Some progress was made in primary education accessibility. Increased attention was given to the health of the girl child, including sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. An increasing number of countries now ban genital mutilation and impose heavier penalties on those involved in sexual abuse, trafficking and all other forms of

²⁸ Pearson. Ibid. p. 66-67

exploitation of the girl child, including for commercial ends. . . However, the persistence of poverty, discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls, negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls, as well as negative stereotyping of girls and boys, limits girls' potential and there is inadequate awareness of the specific situation of the girl child

A Poem by Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, Kenya²⁹

A Freedom Song

*Atieno washes dishes,
Atieno plucks the chicken,
Atieno gets up early,
Beds her sacks down in the kitchen,
Atieno eight years old,
Atieno yo.
Since she is my sister's child
Atieno needs no pay,
While she works my wife can sit
Sewing every sunny day:
With her earnings I support
Atieno yo.
Atieno's sly and jealous,
bad example to the kids
Since she minds them, like a schoolgirl
Wants their dresses, shoes and beads,
Atieno ten years old
Atieno yo.
Now my wife has gone to study
Atieno is less free.
Don't I keep her, school my own ones,
Pay the party, union fee,
All for progress: aren't you grateful
Atieno yo?
Visitors need much attention,
All the more when I work night.
That girl spends too long at market,
Who will teach her what is right?
Atieno is rising fourteen,
Atieno yo.
Atieno's had a baby
So we know that she is bad.
Fifty fifty it may live
And repeat the life she had*

²⁹ in Chipasula, Stella and Frank. The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry 1995. pg. 120.

*Ending in post-partum bleeding
Atieno yo.
Atieno's soon replaced.
Meat and sugar more than all
She ate in such a narrow life
Were lavished on her funeral.
Atieno's gone to glory
Atieno yo.*

Prayer: *For all those girls who do not know what they have to offer, where voices shout bad advice, and beat and scream at her all sorts of dehumanizing names when she steps outside that advice into her own self, we pray, we work, we love, we do whatever we can do. We thank you for men like Joseph who listen to your words and dreams and act upon a different truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, who was conceived within, educated, loved and cared for by a mere teenager, we pray to you. Amen.*

The Final Word

A Prayer from Children's Letters to God, U.S.³⁰

“Dear God, are boys really better than girls? I mean, I know you are one, but try to be fair.”

³⁰ Furlong, ed. Ibid. p. 93

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