

RACISM AND SEXISM: REDRAWING THE CONCEPTUAL AND STRATEGIC MAPS

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I. INTRODUCTION

In a world of race and gender privilege for some, and intentional underprivileged for others, the well-being of women of colour is multiply jeopardized. This paper recognizes power systems of oppression intertwined by judgments placed by those in power on gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, legal statuses, origins, religious and cultural practices.¹ It focuses, however, on interlocking oppression by gender and race.

Thank you for the invitation to analyze both racism and sexism. Too often one is examined to the exclusion of the other. I look forward to talking together this week on how we can educate, and be educated, in ways which mobilize people, ourselves included, to end oppression, not just critique it. In the past decade or two, my philosophy of education has changed. When I taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo and the University of Missouri in the 1970s, I viewed the educator's role as presenting facts, information and tools, and the passing on of revered wisdom to those further back from me on the road. I now understand more clearly that an education that empowers - a liberative, transformative and multi-cultural education - means creating the space where people can step back to gain distance from that taken-for-granted assumptions.

I approach this assignment from a particular angle of vision. I am 1) an African American woman; 2) a sociologist; 3) one who is educationally-privileged; 4) and is actively involved in interfaith and ecumenical work including nine years spent as a "church bureaucrat": Director for Social Responsibility, US and Canada, of the Unitarian Universalist Association; 5) a person active in solidarity movements in support to self-determination efforts of indigenous people of the Americas, Southern Africa and elsewhere; 6) someone who lived through the years of the US civil rights/African led-

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1 I understand oppression to be that fundamental imbalance of power, and hierarchical form of exploitation, which sets up structures at the expense of certain populations which are 1) negative (against their wellbeing), 2) mal distributed, 3) enormous in their impact, 4) blocking the enhancement of life, 5) in typically non-catastrophic yet transgenerational forms.

freedom movement², and 6) someone who is convinced that we got some things wrong back then. Some things right, but, in hindsight, some “band-aids” were placed over a cancer which was not eradicated. The choices I have made in my vocation and career stem from a commitment to participate in the dismantling and eradication of the ideology, patterns and practices of domination that permeate western culture in particular, and global society in general. Having said that, I am mindful of the contradictions inherent in the fact that for this international gathering I write in English, an imperial language, and cite predominantly sources published in the United States.³

Sociologists teach that things look different depending on one’s vantage point.⁴ How persons respond to situations and phenomenon is shaped by our social location within culturally-based hierarchies of power and privilege. My telling you my angle of vision helps prepare both of us for genuine dialogue.⁵ As a Third World womanist,⁶ I will place the experience of women of colour, particularly Black women, at the center of my discussion. I speak from *within*, not *for*, this community.

A caveat: there is no monolithic Third World grouping of women. Racism and sexism are not universally experienced in the same way since systems of oppression (including also judgments on age, origin, class, sexual preference, not being able-bodied and the like) are intertwined. Those of us who are

2 I prefer to use the term “freedom movement” rather than the conventional “civil rights movement” to better capture the Black-led eruption that shook the anti-democratic, white-supremacist foundations of the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s. It did not remove fully the foundations as we hoped but it did shake them loose.

3 Noriko Okada, a Women’s Theological Center alumna, says that there is “an old Asian proverb that says that English can be, and has been, a sword that attacks people and opens the way for the holder of the sword - English speakers”. See Okada, Noriko, “What you Can Expect to Learn in Study/Action”, *Women’s Theological Center Newsletter*, Vol. 7 (4), December 1989, p. 3.

4 This concept is known in sociology as standpoint dependency. It follows that all theologies, as all “knowledge”, is socially located, reflecting a context and a people’s culture.

5 “[D]oing theology [Ed. note: people’s understanding of their lives in relation to God/the divine] in a holistic way requires us to include not only our own experiences and stories but also a critical analysis of the effect this has had on our lives, so that we are prepared to understand the stories and the social, political, and historical analysis of those whose lives are quite different from ours.. The beginning of partnership in dialogue is ‘digging in your own garden’, so that you know what gifts you can bring to the global table talk with your sisters..” In Russell, Letty M., Kwok Pui-lan; Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz; Katie Geneva Cannon, Eds., *Inheriting Our Mothers’ Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspectives*, Louisville: Westminster 1988, p. 15.

6 The term womanist was first coined by Alice Walker, African American writer, to describe audacious women battered by various oppressions yet “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female... womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender”. See Walker, Alice, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983, p. ix. Womanists seek to end all forms of domination.

African, Asian Pacific, indigenous, Latina - women of colour - have different histories, yet daily struggle to overcome exploitation stemming from our inheritances from slavery, enforced migration, plantation and indentured labour, colonialism, attempted genocide, imperial conquest, state repression. Third World women historically have experienced the worst of the legacy of colonial domination, capitalist excesses, and post-colonial practices.⁷ Three quarters of the world's women live in developing countries. More than half of the world's women in the wage labour force live in Asia. Those who work in electronics and other technical assembly positions are under-remunerated for work under unsafe conditions. Most women in Africa and Asia live in rural areas and participate in informal economies where their work is undervalued. Thus the honouring of Rigoberta Menchu with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 was particularly satisfying. It recognizes and affirms the spirit of resistance among indigenous people, and counters the tendency globally to devalue women's work.⁸ It is fitting that she is so appropriately honoured in this Quincentennial year, and on the eve of the United Nations designated year of 1993 as the Year of the Indigenous Peoples of the World.

In this paper, I will use the term *Third World* and *women of colour* interchangeably. The former term has come to connote the colonized, neocolonized, and decolonizing countries of Asia, Oceania, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean. It is used to highlight deliberately the deformities in economic, political and social structures flowing from colonization. For many activists of colour, myself included the term *Third World* is short hand for self-determination. The latter term, *women of colour*, is used in the US to signify recognition of, and resistance to the many ways that power elites have sought to divide populations of colour.

II. THE NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM

Churches have more often focused on race relations, rather than racial justice; relations between men and women, rather than gender justice. Prejudice has been defined as the main problem to be solved, and individual

7 Third World countries have been intentionally underdeveloped so that they might play a service role in the global economy. As such they are vulnerable to the cycles and vagaries of international trade prices and capital flows. This is manifested in the profound international inequalities of land ownership, control over resources, access to income; and in the deprivation of such basic needs as nutrition, housing, safe water, energy, education. For an extended discussion of this point, see Sen, Gita and Caren Grown, *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives*, NY: Monthly Review 1987.

8 Including the coordinated international lobbying effort in which many NGOs, people's movements, religious organizations and individuals participated successfully.

moral responses as the solution. Ethically, can we continue to speak in this fashion? Prejudice reduction without adequate focus upon structural change does little to dismantle as it is experienced by women and men of color.

Religious leaders have too often ignored established power relationships and their legitimating myths. Privilege is not just about what one has; it also includes how one thinks and acts. The intellectual upper class exercises the liberty of being "armchair critics" at the expense of the majority of humankind.

A colour line directs domination/subordination in most multi-ethnic societies. We cannot shy away from examining the naked power realities that exist in our various societies. Whatever the measure - access to safe water, infant mortality rates, educational attainment levels - those with dark skin colour have more of the worst, and the least of the best.

Despite the ending of legal segregation in the US in the mid-twentieth century, for example, women of colour remain clustered, with some exceptions, at the lowest level of the labour force. In the US, for example, while Black women have moved away from majority placement in domestic service, their proportion in the low-paying service sector is close to 45% higher than that of white women.

The resiliency and adaptability of the colour line can be discerned throughout modern history. Case in point: North-South relations. Disproportionate power resides with the lighter-skinned North of the industrialized nations. Here, too, the most of the worst and the least of the best (health care, technological development, physical security and the like) accrue to the Third World countries.

Terms such as *the colour line* and *white supremacy* are accurate conceptualize a world of structural imbalances. Discrimination by race and gender is a subset of oppression, and is a social reality of the current global economy. All human relations are built upon, and around, relations of domination. Belgian priest and physicist Gerard Fourez writes: "Given the historical evolution of society, all human beings are caught up in a history in which certain people are oppressed and exploited. Injustices and oppression arise out of a society built on human choices and historical decisions".⁹

In confronting the politics of an unfair economic order, we can note the diminution of human rights. Established national orders and state institutions evidence gender injustice as a taken-for-granted. The genius of patriarchy has been to conceal its distortions so that most persons are socialized to believe that inequalities by gender are a natural condition of life.

9 Fourez, Gerard, *Liberation Ethics*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1982, p. 100.

Patriarchy is a human construct: a system which maintains women's exploitation via the rule of men, disproportionately First World white or light elites, who control and exercise governmental and corporate power.¹⁰ Domestic relations reflect this pattern. Patriarchy and capitalism are deeply entangled. As US activist Audre Lorde has written:

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation.¹¹

What keeps race and gender stereotypes in place? What re-education must we promote? Do we need a new paradigm about difference? Unknotting the tangled skein of racism, sexism and classism will not be easy.

III. THE COLOUR LINE

In 1904, sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois prophesied accurately the fundamental and continuing problem of the 20th century: the enduring and ever-adaptable colour line.¹² It is our loss that his sociological and moral analyses were undervalued by policy makers, and by the ecumenical community as a whole. Racism cannot be dismantled, he said, by using the categories of prejudice and individual conscience. The crux of the issue is power, not individual attitudes. Beyond ending discrimination, redistribution of power is required.

10 For additional discussion of this point see the "Introduction" in Steady, Filomina Chima, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, Cambridge: Schenkman 1981. An excellent recent resource which documents the consequences of this: United Nations, *The World's Women. 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics*, NY 1991.

11 Lorde, Audre, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Trumansburg: The Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 114-123.

12 Du Bois, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903. The theories of this African American sociologist were discounted because of racist attitudes in the academy.

Failing to focus clear attention and strategic planning on how this is institutionalized clouds our thinking, and our effectiveness in eliminating racial conflict.

This colour line is no mere figure of speech. It is an institution that functions both as distributive rule and as a symbolic universe. That is why time and the normal functioning of institutions will never lead to a future beyond the colour line. Only social change deliberately pursued will do that.¹³

IV. EUROPEAN RACISM TODAY

Europe is experiencing the turmoil of overt and covert racism.¹⁴ More virulent Pan-European racism is visible as upscale, right-wing movements in Europe play on ungrounded fears of being swamped by immigrants. Following World War II for three decades, European nations actively recruited people from the former colonies in Africa, from Eastern Europe, from the southern Mediterranean, to help rebuild Europe's manufacturing and service sector. Perestroika and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall fogged the vision of many who failed to anticipate the reversion to old patterns: the rise of anti-Semitism, skinhead firebombings, attacks on Gypsies, "ethnic cleansing". Even Switzerland, once known for its toleration, has legislated against the presence of too many immigrant workers following its problematizing of the descendants of the guest workers.

Within the last two decades, then, there has been a change in the definition of the problem: previously it was discrimination and exclusion in the way society operates; now it is the people who are racial or linguistic "minorities" themselves¹⁵

The European Right has made inroads into mainstream politics and culture. In Austria, the Freedom Party, led by Jorg Haider, an upscale, charismatic leader, and in France, the National Front, led by ideologue Jean-Marie Le Pen, incite fear despite the share of foreigners in their populations being the same as it was 20 years ago. What Europe wanted was the labour, not the labourer.

13 Anderson, Alan B. & George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Colour Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago*, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press 1986.

14 See, for example, the January-March 1991 issue of *Race & Class* which takes as its theme "Europe: Variations on a theme of racism".

15 In the US, dominant elites began early in the 1960s to talk about people of colour as inherently *the* problem.

Aided by sensationalized statements and stories in the media, more persons are realizing that the Third World contains 75% of the world's population. That people of Asia are ½ of the world's population. That people of Africa, . That most people in the world are yellow, black, brown, poor, female, non-Christian, and non-English speaking. The white man's world is changing.

This reality frightens many persons profiting from power and control in a few elite hands. "We"/they" judgments abound. The steady consolidation of institutional racism is no accident of history, notes David Du Bois of Pacifica News Service, USA.¹⁶ But it is more than a matter of personal attitudes. As collaboration between governments and corporations of the North tightens, and the existing international economic order hardens its position, the ideology of white supremacy surfaces to greater visibility as a means to disempower the South, and protect the status quo.

Racism in the West is not just another variant in the kind of ethnic hatreds that have bedeviled the world for centuries. It is a deeply entrenched attitude among West Europeans and Americans that the white race and Western civilization have been destined by Providence to rule. At a time when both feel threatened, ...racism is gaining acceptance as a 'legitimate' defense.¹⁷

Among whites, that is, not women of colour.

We are concerned that inside international monetary agencies, imperialism has been resuscitated and garbed in the rhetoric of individual economic freedom. Themes and images of democracy are being used to delegitimize the visions and programs of those who would redistribute power more evenly among the peoples of the world. The demands of people of colour, of women, of unions are being tarnished and discounted as illegitimate.

Computer technology is being used to block people of colour from coming into Europe. Common market policies, rules and administrative apparatus have been set up, informed by racism, whereby information is exchanged on immigration, policing, security, drugs - the pathology of "the other" as the fungus of racism. As A. Sivanandam of the London Institute of Race Relations notes of the immigrants:

[I]t is capital, multinational capita, that throws them up on Europe's shores in the first place... multinational corporations predicate the dic-

16 Du Bois, David G., "Racism, U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rising Tide of Colour", *African Commentary*, May 1990.

17 Franz Schurmann, Pacifica News Service, 10/28/91.

tatorships that imperialism sets up for them. Trade no longer follows the flag, the flag follows trade. All sorts of trade: the trade in armaments which foments local wars, the trade in tourism which makes hotels out of fishermen's homes and peasants' huts...¹⁸

V. THE BEGINNINGS OF EMPIRE

Let us examine how laws and practices have been crafted on the basis of the colour line. Racism emerged in the 14th and 15th centuries. Oppression was a feature of many societies before this time, but what was insidious about Christopher Columbus was the commodification of the indigenous people who welcomed him. Europeans had been to the shores of the "New World" before. After Columbus, no longer were they persons to be traded with, but themselves were the product. Columbus wrote in his log:

They...brought us parrots and balls of cotton and cane spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned...they were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features...they do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance...they would make fine servants...with fifty men we could subjugate them and make them do whatever we want.¹⁹

500 years ago European expansionism initiated the extensive political transformation of the world. With the rise of the first global empires, peoples on many continents were pulled into intra-European conflicts. A new division of the world's labour began. In Europe, serfdom declined. In the Americas, slavery increased. Europe accumulated wealth and power previously unimaginable. Development for one group of people was destruction or underdevelopment, for another. The dividing line? The judgment as "heathen" by the European explorers and royalty of people who differed in colour and practices. White Europeans became the "norm" five hundred years ago, as ethnocentric judgments of other as alien, lesser than in appearance, ability, customs, were enforced. The model for today's continuing white supremacy was in place.

Colonial rule, whether 15th century, 19th or 20th operates "by setting up visible, rigid, and hierarchical distinctions between the colonizer and the col-

18 Sivanandan, A., *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism*, London: Verso 1990, p. 159. Sivanandan is the moving force behind the Institute of Race Relations in London, and editor of the journal *Race and Class*.

19 Zinn, Howard, *A People's History of the United States*, New York: Harper & Row 1980, Chapter I.

onized. the physical and symbolic separation of the races was deemed necessary to maintain social distance and authority over subject peoples".²⁰ A bureaucratic and racialized masculinity resulted as colonial state powers differentiated for purposes of economic surplus extraction. The ideologies about maleness and femaleness which undergirded this process, remain despite nominal, "flag independence" of former colonies. One can see this in the sex tourism industry, and in the traditional connection of the military with prostitution.²¹ It cannot be forgotten that the formative studies for the fledging disciplines of anthropology and sociology were of Third World women.²² The Euro-centricity of this can be seen in the fact that it was the fertility rates of Third World women more often studied than anything else.²³

The violation in 1492 of indigenous people of the Americas was by "Christ-bearing" exploiters who "shaped the futures of blacks and indigenous peoples for the next 500 years by generating an economic system and an ideological system to sustain it", says Jeane Sindab, formerly of the World Council of Churches. The violent "double thievery" from indigenous people in the Americas and in Africa "provided the economic and political power which established, maintained, and expanded the exploitative capitalist system which today continues to perpetuate racism and inequality".²⁴

There is transformative potential in looking at formative ideologies that rationalize power imbalance and its reproduction.²⁵ Organizing around the Quincentenary in the US, Latin American and Europe has provided a window to view core realities of western culture, and the flaws in our practice of faith. The 1992/Kairos USA movement takes pride in helping blunt the pro-

20 Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, "Cartographies of Struggle", in Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1991, p. 17.

21 For further discussion of this point, contact the Third World Movement Against Exploitation of Women, P.O. Box 1434, Manila 2800, the Philippines. The decision of the Philippine Senate not to extend the lease held by the US government on the Subic Bay military post is most welcomed. As the US Marines withdrew in November, however, evidence surfaced of chemicals and PCBs leaching into the soil and ground water at "entertainment industry" will no doubt be regrown in the contaminated area.

22 For an excellent discussion of this point see the "Introduction" in Steady, Filomina Chioma, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, Cambridge: Schenkman 1981.

23 At the close of the twentieth century, more researchers are focusing on the threat and reality of sexual violence for populations underdeveloped by colonialist hierarchies.

24 Sindab, Jeane, "Black, Indigenous People and the Churches: 1992", Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1990. This paper is one of several contained in the study/action packet of the National Council of Churches, USA, *Responding Faithfully to the Quincentenary*, \$9., from the MCCC Prophetic Justice Unit, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.

25 A working definition of ideology: a) a belief system, a way of looking at the world, b) which reflects a systematic distortion c) that is not conspicuous, d) thus allowing the ideas to serve a function of maintaining a status quo power arrangement.

posed, then cancelled, civic celebrations this October of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing. The faith-based movement understood that these were to be not so much remembrances of times past, but were a reaffirmation of conquest now and its hierarchies of power. People's movements, some faith-based, reshaped the debate about Christopher Columbus's role among the general public in the Americas.²⁶

VI. THE UNITED STATES CONTEXT

It cannot be said often enough that racial group designations are not generated automatically as part of the natural order of the universe. They are socially imposed categories of "otherness" that persons outside the set-apart group have decided are important to single out. Let me turn to my own country to illustrate these points. "[S]triving for freedom rather than proscriptions in our industrialized societies is part of an ideology that supports the dominant groups by concealing social domination."²⁷ Every human group has a creation myth, a tale explaining where its members came from and why they are special. White Americans are no exception. A "creation myth" operates beneath the surface of North American culture, and undergirds notions of American exceptionalism, of being "No. 1". The myth holds that Europe was crowded and old-fashioned, while there was much open space in the "New World" just waiting for development by strong men and their helpmates. Having fled, then, "Old World" tyranny, these hardy and virtuous pioneers overcame the savagery of the heathen Indians and tamed the wilderness. This myth obscures the brutal theft of the people and land as the United States emerged as a nation.²⁸ With but few exceptions, the conquest and exploitation of land, resources and people was accompanied and legitimized by the Christian Church.

In this "Christian nation", religion and real estate became entangled as a world-view developed permitting the expropriation of property and the denial of human rights to indigenous people.²⁹ It can be argued that judgments

26 Dismantling the mythology of Columbus will be a long haul struggle in the US, but in chipping away at old myths, we gained regular reports in major media on differing perspectives, changes in museum displays and corporate advertisements, and the cancellation of large-scale civic celebrations.

27 Fourez, *ibid*, p. 8.

28 For further elaboration of this point, see Limerick, Patricia Nelson, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, NY: Norton 1987.

29 The social construction of "race" consolidated people from over 300 sovereign societies as "Indians", so, too, Ibos, Fulanis, Ashantis and others came to be grouped as servant/slave "Negroes". This occurred simultaneously with the switch for whites from the

of inferiority and superiority flow from hierarchical Judeo-Christian religions. A recent book by US historian Forrest Wood notes "grievous wounds" inflicted by Christianity upon the United States.³⁰ Wood posits that Christianity is "fundamentally racist in its theology, organization and practice", and that the "fundamental component of the Christian's racism [is] his [or her] inherent inability to leave other people alone".³¹ The "taproot of cultural myopia", Wood argues, is Christianity's unshakable premise that everyone should be a Christian, that his or her meaning system and spiritual practices are flawed. "There are contradictions in every religion", writes Wood, "but the missionary quality of Christianity magnifies the consequences of its contradictions".³²

This argument can not be shunted aside as we deepen our examination of racism and moral exclusion.

VII. IDEOLOGIES OF WOMANHOOD

Patriarchy, too, is a human construct, and one that has been sustained by Christian rationalizations. The concept denotes a system which maintains women's exploitation and oppression via the rule of men exercising controlled power in government, corporation, religious and other institutions, and domestic relations. Capitalism and patriarchy are inextricably intertwined.

As capitalism developed, so, too, a cult of true (read: white) womanhood developed. The superior race was white. The superior gender was male. Women and men of colour were inferior. A gender and race hierarchy directly benefited those with power and money: the church hierarchy as well as the evolving mercantile class, both sponsors of explorers such as Christopher Columbus.

The bodies and souls of Indigenous women bore the burden of invasion and rape. Indigenous women, whether of the Americas or of Africa, were seen as different in kind: tempestuous, there for the sexual gratification of those "christianizing" the "New World". The children that resulted were deemed impure, defective. Today's multi-hued and multi-textured realities are old, yet new, realities.

predominant identity of "Christian" to that of Europeanness. See Pieterse, Jan Nederveen, "Fictions of Europe", *Race and Class*, Vol. 32(3), January-March 1991.

30 Wood, Forrest G., *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century*, New York: Knopf 1990.

31 Ibid, p. 22.

32 Ibid, p. 26. Muslims believe in one God but they do not have the same mission obligation to force others to believe.

During the August 1992 Latin American Council of Churches 500 Anos Assembly sessions, participants reflected on the churches' sanctioning of colonialism by weaving notions of proper structures into religious concepts. White women were used to stabilize the hierarchy. In contrast, Indian and Black women were defined outside that circle, depicted as passionate and tempestuous, the roots of evil. Vicenta Mamani Bernabe, an Aymaran woman from Bolivia, called for native women to be respected as they are:

our clothes, our culture, our language, our dignity, our rights, our voices must be listened to and respected, because we are people just like the whites and mestizos.

VIII. WESTERN PRACTICES OF CHRISTIANITY

Can the church be a site of resistance to hegemonic race-gender domination?³³ All problems *cannot* be solved with sufficient good will. That is a domesticating intellectualism that distorts reality and perpetuates oppression. The edifice of capitalism as we know it, with its inequities, oppressions and exploitations, must be dismantled. Can our "walk" better match our "talk"?

Recall how the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would expound on the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan. He would tell the Biblical story, then say:

We are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only the initial act. One day the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be beaten and robbed as they make their journey through life. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

In placing our highest priority in western Christianity on a personal relationship with God - in effect placing highest priority on the individual, not the individual-in-community - we hamper positive social change. Western Christianity supports the gravitational pull of individualism, away from all but the worshipping community. I suggest that too often a religious world view masks our view of the ways by which beggars are continuously being created. The false idol of capitalism permeates our churches legitimating inequitable

33 Hegemony refers to a system in which politics operates largely through the incorporation of oppositional currents into the prevailing system of rule. Antonio Gramsci conceptualized bigeminy as the welding together of differing social forces into a bloc. Under hegemonic conditions, opposition is not repressed or silent. Rather, it is inserted, reinterpreted into expressions, media images, politicized slogans.

distribution of resources. The individualism within the culture of capitalism distorts our seeing reality.³⁴ Westernized Christians have over-focused on attitudes, individual irrational beliefs, rather than on the over-privilege/advantage of those with light skin colour and the oppression/disadvantage of those with darker hues.

A historic gathering of Indigenous, African American and African Caribbean church people convened by the World Council of Churches in 1990 issued a 7-page declaration which spoke of many things, including the travesty of:

... a system of loan repayment [which] deprives our communities of adequate health care, education, social services and locks our generations into desperate poverty, illiteracy, poor housing and ill health. In Brazil millions of children, most African-Americans, who have been forced by poverty into a life on the streets, are being murdered by sanctioned death squads. Indigenous people are being destroyed along with the forests, lands and waters of the Amazon...Racism is rampant in Brazil and all of Latin America.³⁵

Further, much in Christianity undergirds traditional beliefs in a male prerogative to be personally served by women, within the home and without. Women are the glue which keeps the church intact. Yet we are too often seen as support persons, rather than leaders, lay for clergy.³⁶ Are the motifs and symbols of Christian theology that lend support to this, and to enduring pain, not resisting, oppression? Womanists and feminists in the church are dialoguing about disempowering symbols and metaphors. It is a "no holds barred" conversation. If all theologies are socially located, then Lutherans and others must be willing to deconstruct even the theology of the cross.

Professor Delores Williams, Union Theological Seminary, raises questions about negative messages within interpretations of the cross. A subordinate-dominance paradigm is inherent in western Christianity, she posits. If God the Father sanctioned His son's death on the cross, some reason, she says, then fathers have a right to control their children, even to the point of physi-

34 This western tradition can be contrasted with a notation from a Chinese student in the U.S. who wrote in her journal: "The Chinese people believe that wisdom is pulled together by the people, thus we have the proverb: Three shoe menders are wiser than one scholar. In "Wurzel, Jaime, "Teaching Reflective Thinking: Cultural Constraints and Cross Cultural Responses", unpublished and undated manuscript.

35 "The Rio Proclamation: Indigenous, African-Americans and African-Caribbeans Unite Against Racism In the Americas and the Caribbean", September 29, 1990.

36 The Anglican Church of England decision in November favouring the ordination of women is a welcome sign of hope.

cal harm. If Jesus's "redemptive suffering" and death of the cross was to atone for the sins of human beings, suffering can be seen as having a positive function. Women, particularly those of colour, are to accept their burden.³⁷ Luz Beatriz Arellano speaks, too, of the pull towards martyrdom for women:

Women find in Jesus the example of the freedom of giving one's life for others, and the example of a life placed at the service of others with utter gratuity.³⁸

Dr Delores Williams questions the violence and cannibalism in the ritual of the eucharist:

Believers eat the bread (symbolic of Jesus' broken body) and drink the wine (symbolic of the blood Jesus shed on the cross, supposedly for our sins). In addition to the cannibalist insinuations in this ritual, the accompanying ritual-word as it is spoken in many churches, puts great emphasis upon the sacrifice Jesus made in dying for human sin. The question that always comes to my mind is whether this emphasis upon dying-sacrifice has implications for women's oppression. Since many women are conditioned to sacrifice 'all' for their family's wellbeing, I wonder if the 'sacred sacrifice', achieved through brutalization of Jesus' body, can encourage battered women to stay in battering situations, thereby sacrificing themselves for some 'higher 'purpose' like family unity?³⁹

Dr Peri Rasolondraibe, in contrast, argues that the *Way of the Cross* can be dynamically taught as a "sacrificial willingness to accept the cost of standing *with* and *for* the victims of injustice, and yet a firm resolution not to allow injustice to have the last word".⁴⁰ Yet we cannot discount the argument by Dr Williams and by womanists: it's time for women of colour to get down from the cross, and work together for change.

37 Williams, Delores, "Humans Brutalizing Humans: Necessary Images in the Christian Religion", *The Women's Theological Center Newsletter*, Vol. 9, (1), March 1991, p. 1-2.

38 Arellano, Luz Beatriz, "Women's Experience of God in emerging Spirituality", in Fabella, Virginia and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion & Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, Maryknoll: Orbis 1989.

39 Williams, *ibid*, p. 1-2.

40 Rasolondraibe, Peri, "A theology of Empowerment", *world Encounter*, No. 2, 1990, p. 21.

IX. NEW THEMES

Those who recognize the social effect of such imagery, says Prof Williams, must search of more healing images and traditions within the sacred text and beyond. She suggests the mustard seed symbolizing faith and the linking humans with the web of living things (Luke 13:18-19):

Lifting up the mustard seed as a central image in the Christian religion has the social effect of raising our consciousness about the way societies see and relate to nature and the religious effect of providing hope for human destiny.⁴¹

Prof Williams notes, too, that the wilderness imagery offers a bridge to Judaism, Islam and others religions which also have important wilderness events and import in their theologies.⁴²

[i]f christians can think of their redemption as modeled not by Jesus on the cross but by Jesus refusing the temptations Satan offered him in the wilderness, more human volition is involved in redemption than the death on the cross indicates. That is, redemption becomes more realistic in light of the way we experience it, for we do have the power to resist or assent to sinful temptations, just as Jesus did in the wilderness.⁴³

Women on various continents are reading the Bible newly, interpreting from the perspective of those marginalized by an inequitable distribution of power. Professor Kwok Puilan, Chinese University of Hong Kong, notes that:

The images and metaphors we use to talk about God are necessarily culturally conditioned, and biblical ones are no exceptions... Our religious imagination cannot be based on the Bible alone, which often excludes women's experience. I cannot believe that truth is only revealed in a book written almost two thousand years ago, and that the Chinese have no way to participate in its inception... Coming from the southern part of China, where rice is a main food, I have often found the biblical images of bread-making and yeast-rising as alienating... The Chinese,

41 Ibid, p. 3.

42 See also Taylor, Mark Kline, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis*, Maryknoll: Orbis 1990 which proposes "a christology in which Christ names a socio-historical dynamic of reconciliatory emancipation... primacy is given to emancipation from patterns of domination, while insisting that christic emancipation also entails reconciliatory postures that seek out, study, and celebrate difference and plurality". (p. 21)

43 Williams, Ibid, p. 3.

who live in an agricultural setting instead of a pastoral environment, have imaged the divine as compassionate, non-intrusive, immanent in and continuous with nature.⁴⁴

One's particular social location determines how one hears even the Exodus story, central to many liberation theologies as a story of God taking the side of oppressed people. A Native American writer reminds us it is also the story of appropriation of land from those already settled. It is a story of the subordination of the Canaanites:

I read the Exodus story with Canaanite eyes. And, it is the Canaanite side of the story that has been overlooked by those seeking to articulate theologies of liberation. Especially ignored are those parts of the story that describe Yahweh's command to mercilessly annihilate the indigenous population..⁴⁵

Mercy Amba Oduyoye speaks of herself as an African Christian woman who was brought up in the mother-centred culture of the Akan. As she moved in westernized academic circles, some challenged her world-view as inferior. With deep insight, Mercy Oduyoye writes:

Patriarchy, it was said, was a superior structure... My Akan blood proved an effective insulation against patriarchal domination and gave me energy to be myself... I cannot speak for other African women.. [yet] I am convinced that there is a growing number of African women who refuse to bow the knee to the Baal lord called patriarchy and that there shall always be. I, therefore, refuse to gloss over the oppressive aspects of African culture.

She acknowledges that she continues to "struggle with what holds women to religion when male-manipulated religion consigns women to a situation of submission and alienation".⁴⁶

Religion can be a source of power for women, or it can be a force of subordination. Arellano presents an insightful analysis of Nicaraguan women coming to recognize, during the revolution for change in their country, new possibilities for common struggle in reconceptualizations of God and Jesus. Women, "essentially bearers and sustainers of life", discovered that the god

44 Pui-lan, Kwok, "Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters", in Russell et al, *ibid*, p. 30.

45

46 Oduyoye, Mercy Amba, "Christian Feminism and African Culture: The 'Hearth' of the Matter", in Ellis, Marc H. & Otto Maduro, Eds., *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*. Maryknoll: Orbis 1989, p. 442-446.

they had been taught about was of a different sort. God, as the God of life, “journeys with us through history”. She speaks of the “rediscovery of God as mother, not just as father, not just as protector, but as one who is immensely concerned for the poor and for the least, for those who have been left unattended”.⁴⁷

At this summer’s Latin American Council of Churches 500 Anos Assembly, the word of God was affirmed as a sustaining force, the “bread” of both education and consolation. But the institutional church and its practice of Christianity was faulted. “We are made to sing the hymns of the conquerors in church”, said one delegate, “while still experiencing the whips on our backs”. Following workshop deliberations and plenary discussions, the participants declared that the church which has perpetuated the ideal of women’s inferiority must now take the lead in debunking and dismantling all that flows from that distortion.⁴⁸

We have seen that women are tracked, and often locked in track, to be care givers by the sexual division of labour within the church. Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, Lutheran World Federation Secretary for Women in Church and Society, notes:

[d]iscrimination promotes the uneconomic use of women’s talents... Despite the willingness of many women to identify with the church, others are distancing themselves, and even leaving, either silently or protesting.⁴⁹

To undo patriarchy and the colour line, we must be about justice-actions. We are called to be agents of transformation, empowering ourselves, each other and our communities with the help of the Spirit.

X. INTEGRATION AND ASSIMILATION

I return to lessons I am learning in the US from the experiences of those whose motto was “to save the soul of America”. Through inadvertence on the one hand, and shrewd organization of the hard right in the US on the other, that motto faded into the background. There is much nostalgia about the achievements of the African American-led freedom movement. Only now are more social scientists examining the roll-back of the freedom movement. Ideas began to surface articulating a conservative ideological framework.

47 Arellano, *ibid.*

48 Personal notes.

49 Kanyoro, Musimbi, “women in the Communion”, *World Encounter*, Number 2, 1990, p. 14.

Words like “quota” and “reverse discrimination” were coined.⁵⁰ By the end of the 1960s, forward movement was being blunted by the racialized reaction to integration of people of colour. How flat and truncated now seem the textbook presentations of the stories about the “civil rights movement” in the 1960s and 1970s! I can speak most clearly of the flaws within American society, and attest to the fact that white Americans have been historically “weak-willed in insuring racial justice. The terms used for discussing racial issues shape our perception and response to these issues”.⁵¹ Difference came to equal deficiency as resistance to power-sharing mounted.

The ground was set for this in part by the acclaim heaped upon a book titled *An American Dilemma*⁵² which influenced decades of thinking in the U.S. and beyond. A Swedish economist, Dr. Gunnar Myrdal saw the possibility of racial equality in the United States. A strategy exposing the internal inconsistencies inside white America would inevitably lead to change, he argued. Elements in the American creed could be leverage points: essential dignity of the individual, the fundamental equality of all people, the inalienable rights to freedom, justice, fair opportunity. Myrdal’s optimism about the American dilemma - the gap between ideals and praxis - infused strategies and public policies inside and outside of church structures. The premise: educate the minds and hearts of white America and change will come. For but a brief moment in time, it seemed to work.

Now we see more clearly. Complicating matters for women of colour in the Americas today is their concentration in urban centres as the primary mode of production switches away from industrialism. In the US, a large percentage of families are headed by a single mother. Further complications result from the fact that integrated public schools post the 1950s have not resulted in quality education for children of colour. The integration typically implemented was a one-way process whereby African American children were viewed as culturally inferior (“culturally deprived”) and needy of an infusion of white values and perspectives.

In the US, integration has been falsely elevated as superior to the choice inherent in pluralism. Assimilation is part of that social legitimation which attempts to shift allegiances. It places racial integration as *the* goal rather than a means to power sharing. U.S. sociologist, Bell Hooks notes that

50 For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon, see Michael Ohi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s*, NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1986.

51 West, Cornel, “Learning to Talk of Race”, *New York Times Magazine*, August 2, 1992.

52 Myrdal, Gunnar, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, NY: Harper & Row 1944.

“[r]esisting the pressure to assimilate is a part of our struggle to end white supremacy”.

Women, too, must wrestle with assimilation pressures. Systems which are corrupt and racist need to be changed, not adapted to. Women’s knowledge, and that of men of colour, is not so simply additive to, or a subset of, that which has been up till now the “mainstream”. As philosopher Elizabeth Minnich writes:

‘Mainstreaming’ implies that there is one main stream and what we want is to join it, that we are a tributary at best, and that our goal is to achieve the ‘normally’ of becoming invisible in the big river. ‘transformation’, on the other hand, puts the emphasis not on joining what is but on changing it... Equity requires more than access to unchanged structures.⁵³

The feminist community in the US has been challenged correctly for being middle class assimilationist in nature. Universal sisterhood is not the norm, and those whose first language may not be English, and those who are of dark skin colour, have been treated as “other”. Some small progress is being made, but it demands that white women become “sufficiently, explicitly angry” or they will repeat the pattern of the past of breaking temporary alliances with activist women of colour.

Anti-colonial struggles were about more than inclusion. The substitution of *integration* for *social transformation* has been too successful in the US, Great Britain and elsewhere. Talk of integration and equal opportunity deflected us away from building different structures. The shift of emphasis from transforming society to transforming individuals one by one had devastating consequences. Those in dominant society not wanting a change in the status quo, moved even more swiftly in the second half of the 20th century to shape the contours of culture so that progress towards equality in participation would be halted. And thus women of colour remain at risk: disproportionately poor and vulnerable.

While sounding noble and wise, the concept of equal opportunity is grounded in a dangerous presumption. It is based on the concept of racial disadvantage, not on that of institutionalized racism and dominating oppression. Further, equality is not something conferred by white people. White western elites have controlled and inculcated values and institutions that create and sustain the norms of an elite culture. Are they, too, to have the

53 Minnich, Elizabeth Kamarack. *Transforming Knowledge*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1990, pp. 13, 22.

power and control over the conferral of equality, of common human personhood, over people of colour? I think not.

XI. INTEGRATIONIST APPROACH TO CAPITALISM

DAWN (development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), a network of activists, researchers and policymakers, has been most outspoken in questioning the integrationist approach to First World capitalism.⁵⁴ The privatization and commercialization trend of international money lenders reduces women's access to resources, and is resulting in growing impoverishment, insufficient distribution of food, horrendous debt repayment burdens, environmental degradation, disproportionate military expenditures, more domestic repression, and more foreign aggression.

The United Nations' declared Decade for the Advancement of Women, 1975-1985, focused on non-inclusion issues in the process of growth and development. Attention was paid to increasing women's share in resources, whether land, education or employment relative to men. At the same time, however, the socioeconomic status of the majority of Third World women was worsening: relative and absolute health, decline in educational status, etc. The insufficient funded small-scale and fragmented projects have rarely had long term sustainability.⁵⁵

Another global gathering of women will take place in 1995 in Beijing. It will be important; but will it be sufficient? Sisterhood is not a new discovery in major parts of the globe. It is a westernized and middle class phenomenon stemming from the mid-20th century North American and European suburbanization process. For women of Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, for example, their roles have been embedded in gender-segregated societies. Typically, the majority of ordinary women have exercised the greatest degree of structures participation socially, economically and politically within the parallel structures of gender segregated communities. This is not to say, however, that women's organizations are the democratic in nature. As parallel institutions, they often reflect the fundamental patriarchy of the west. Women have consistently been interdependent; however the relationships have been characterized by domination and by exploitation here too. As mentioned earlier, gains for one population - European immigrant women as capitalism began - were made at the expense of women of native nations who lost land and control over their bodies. European immigrant women gained

54 Sen & Grown, *ibid.*

55 The United Nations announced in November that 50% of all appointments will be women. While gaining parity is an important step, it is not the sole step needed.

healthier food, longer living children, and the like from this accumulation of capital.⁵⁶

XII. SIGNS OF HOPE

Religious communities can develop, support, advocate, embody social policies which change the distribution of power and goods. Some women seminarians do not aspire to privatized, status-quo supporting roles in ministry, and they are being supported by a small number of progressive faculty members. The increase in women seminarians is dramatic in the US, yet the number of women faculty is slow to increase. There is, however, a growing body of feminist literature in religious studies.

Some women do not find enrichment and empowerment in the traditional seminary learning process. A group of women theological educators came together in the late 1970s, and their concerns and visions crystallized in the Women's Theological Center, Boston, Massachusetts, with which I am affiliated. The impetus for its founding ten years ago was the 1976 declaration from Rome that since Christ "was and remains a man" the priesthood must also be male. Women faculty at Yale Divinity School and Washington Theological Union began to plan alternative models of theological education for women. The proposals gained shape and substance, and the Women's Theological Center came into being in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, as a center addressing women's issues of faith and social justice in community. Its central tenet: the belief that concepts and theories must be tested in the concrete struggles for justice.⁵⁷

The Women's Theological Centre (WTC) offers an alternative year-long graduate Study/Action Program where women develop and explore a feminist/womanist ethic and praxis transforming oppressive religious and social structures. Students coming from varying faith traditions and racial and national backgrounds are encouraged to do their own theological reflection, not just collect the revered, esoteric wisdom typically of the Eurocentric past. Among the elements in the conscious move away from a patriarchal model of Church and ministry:

56 For a thorough discussion of the social history of different modes of productive activity for US women, see Amott, Teresa L. and Julie A. Matthei, *Race, Gender & Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States*, Boston: South End Press 1991.

57 "WTC is committed to search for a pedagogy that integrates a) content and process, b) intellect and emotion, c) theory and practice". Kwok, Pui Lan, "Women and Theological Education: Changes in the Past Decade and News Questions", *Women's Theological Center Newsletter*, 1987.

- 1) a collaborate teaching and learning method; students and faculty are co-learners
- 2) social analysis from a feminist/womanist perspective
- 3) a social ministry emphasis
- 4) a field-based praxis experience integral to studies and reflection
- 5) a cross-national participant body

Questions of spirituality, social analysis, community accountability and social praxis are rooted in the life experiences of the participants, and in the contradictions experienced as students interact with women in battered women's shelters, prisons and the like.

Through work with women in field sites, our images of God, humanity, and community are reshaped and our understanding of faith is renewed in the context of justice-action. Through both our diversity and our field-based work, many of the fundamental tenets of feminist theory are shaken from their middle-class moorings and given new meaning. For example, we see the feminist concepts of mutuality and bodily integrity in a new light in the contexts in which we work, and we must grapple with questions that do not confront us in more isolated academic settings. What is the meaning of mutuality between a graduate student in theology and the woman who is homeless, suffering from the disorienting effects of street life, hunger or mental illness?⁵⁸

WTC is but one small-scale sign of hope. Another: the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians which speaks of passionate compassion as the necessary ingredient of faith-filled justice-actions.⁵⁹ Yet another: the Asia-Pacific gathering of hundreds in Thailand of the People's Plan for the 21st Century. This is the second gathering of a broadening coalition of organizations and activists committed to "make their voices heard to the rest of the world to break the monopoly of world affairs held by the self-proclaimed custodians of the 'New World Order'".⁶⁰

58 Richardson, Nancy, "Feminist Theology/Feminist Pedagogy: an Experimental Program of the Women's Theological Center", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p. 120.

59 See Fabella and Oduyoye, *ibid.*

60 PP21 Thailand promotional material, 1992. contact address: PP21 Organizing Committee, 2304 Paholyothin Road, Chatuchak, Bangkok 10900, Thailand.

XIII. NEW MESSAGES

Such gatherings, including this convened by the Lutheran World Federation, are vitally important. We of the pulpit and podiums cannot sit back behind the polite smokescreen of good intentions, comforting those who adamantly project their innocence. We must unmask contemporary obfuscations that say to be concerned about gender and racial injustice is to be a "special interest" group.

Mine is an erosion theory of change. We must chip away, and chip away again, at structures that enforce domination for some and subordination for others. Sitting with each other, being friendly with each other, liking each other even - band-aids over a cancer unless we work together for an equitable sharing of power.

The church offers a unique potential through its communication channels to and among the needy and the affluent, leaders and the led, the public sector and the private. Those accepting the ministerial or professorial vocation are indeed "wordsmiths", framing reality with language. It is language that evokes most of the political realities that people recall, not the experience first hand itself. We can cut through mystifications, dismantling myths that are sexist, racist, classist, nationalist in content.⁶¹

Racism and sexism are troublesome *kudzu* vines which must be cut back daily. This is a weed that grows in the southern part of the United States. It persistently creeps and climbs - across roadways, up telephone poles, engulfing all in its path. I believe more people can come to understand, and then convey overarching messages about the dual kudzu vines:⁶²

(a) the past need not be the future; (b) difference can be enriching; (c) we have a responsibility to dismantle domination; (d) in the Christian traditions of seeing the stranger as blessing, we have an opportunity to develop a new international order of just relations; (e) there is a real basis for unity between peoples courageous steadfast in the face of adversity.

61 One example: Professor Patricia Williams, University of Wisconsin, USA, refuses to speak of the "emancipation" of slaves in the US after the Civil War. She uses "unowned" or "disowned": "they were thrust out of the market and into a nowhere land that was not quite the mainstream labour market, and very much outside the marketplace of rights. They were placed beyond the bounds of valuation, in much the same way that the homeless are or that nomads and gypsies are, or tribal people who refuse to ascribe to the notion of private space..." In Williams, Patricia, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 21.

62 Writer Alice Alker first publicly used this metaphor in speaking of racism as like a kudzu vine; it needs to be daily cut back.c

Transformative solutions are possible. They move beyond assimilationist, additive “solutions”, to transform power imbalances. If we unmask myths and claim possibilities, we can break encrusted habits of thought.

XIV. THEREFORE, WE MUST ...

1. speak the truth, not sugar-coating reality by speaking of racism and sexism as random acts of perverse or ignorant individuals. Racism is a system of advantage that benefits those with white or light skin colour. It is not an abstraction nor is it a problem only for people of colour who bear the greatest burden. As people of faith, we must educate ourselves and others about the other side of racism: white/light privilege.⁶³
2. become more comfortable with the dynamic of tension as a given, and a positive, creative force. “As one reads of women’s lives in the Church”, write Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye “the evidence begins to emerge that ‘women become dangerous/ when we question ‘the powerful and masculine models of the internal structures of the church’, and as such our presence has been construed as source of tension”.⁶⁴ Be aware of this dynamic, and resist such labelling.
3. recognize plural realities.⁶⁵ We must transform our conceptual categories so that they represent the wholeness of human experience, not the false universalism based on a particular European male experience.
4. acknowledge that justice is a quality of relationship not an abstract concept. We must travel “paths as yet untrodden through perils unknown”.⁶⁶ The power of the Spirit is the power for changing our communities and world.
5. resist oppression in all its forms by actively joining with organizations and movements supporting change. We must form and/or join commu-

63 Dr. Peggy McIntosh, a white professor at Wellesley College, USA, has written: “Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative and average, and also ideal... My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor”. there is an invisible knapsack that all white European descent people carry around, she says, that both facilitates daily passage and confers and confirms dominance. In the knapsack are the compass, passport, money, clothing, etc. that allows special passage. “Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was subtly trained to visit in turn upon people of colour”, she writes. “Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end” the deeply entrenched problems of racism and white privilege. See McIntosh, Peggy, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”, *Peace and Freedom*, July/August 1989.

64 Fabella and Ad, *ibid*, p. xiii.

65 Latina feminists, for example, speak of a mestiza consciousness which recognizes multiple, often contradictory, perspectives which must be negotiated.

66 *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

- nities of resistance which work against all that would create marginalized populations.
6. recast our strategies and solutions so they are more than “bandaids” - necessary but not sufficient. This includes acknowledging the gap between legislative provisions and defacto conditions.
 7. protest the Structural Adjustment Programs imposed on countries by international monetary agencies which doom marginalized nations to impoverishment of those of darker hue.
 8. work for fair standards of health care and safe housing access for all peoples.
 9. support the self-determination struggles of indigenous people in Asia and the Pacific, and on all the continents. sponsor concrete actions in 1993, the UN declared Year of Indigenous People.
 10. accompany those who are marginalized in working for system change. This would include supporting sanctions and other strategies in the continuing struggles of the African National Congress for a non-racial, democratic and united South Africa of equal citizens.
 11. advocate for inclusion of women in development planning and implementation.
 12. teach that sexism and racism are an affront to the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Condemn male violence against women as a violation of basic human rights. Condemn hate violence, as in the practice of “ethnic cleansing” evident in Bosnia and Herzegovia but also reflected in Angola and other parts of the globe.
 13. support the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Nairobi Forward Strategies.
 14. urge full denominational and institutional representation and participation in the regional gatherings preparatory to the Beijing 1995 United Nations International Women’s Forum.
 15. increase financial and political support for the Programme to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches, insisting that grants be given to organizations struggling for self-determination.⁶⁷

67 In establishing PCR in 1969, the Central Committee of the WCC called the churches “to move beyond charity, grants and traditional programming to relevant and sacrificial action leading to new relationships of dignity and justice among all and to become agents for the radical reconstruction of society (PCR brochure, circa 1980s)”. Twenty plus years later, giving to the PCR evidences lack of adequate response by some member communions within the World Council of Churches.

16. face, and counter persuasively, the equivocations, as well as the genuine lack of ease of some parishioners, with the dignity and full equality of all women within, and without, our midst.
17. examine procedures, politicized processes, decision-making styles and group dynamics for inequitable mono-cultural and gender-dominated styles and practices. Honest dialogue must be encouraged and heeded.
18. share leadership roles within the communion, “accepting the gifts and special calling of each member and nurturing each... Women in the communion cry for justice”.⁶⁸
19. guard against “power shifts: away from traditional power centres when women of colour are placed in positions formerly occupied by mainstream males. The authority of the position must be maintained.
20. promote diversity in the use of language, music, art and movement in our worship services.
21. be open to inclusion of the people’s voice and stories of resistance and faith in our liturgies and general praxis. Theology must not be restricted to professional theologians, and, in fact, cannot be if we ever are to de-colonize Christianity.
22. urge denominational and ecumenical funding for women’s empowerment projects which build just communities.
23. advocate for denominational funding for research and training on dismantling the structures of racism and sexism.
24. advocate and develop both feminist/womanist foci and pedagogies in our institutions which place mutuality at its core. Assimilation debilitates us all. We will gain from the way womanists do theology.
25. And, most of all, remain enraged about injustice. African American writer and activist Audre Lorde says that “[e]very woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against..oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change..[A]nger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification...Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change”.⁶⁹

As a North American, for example, I must acknowledge, and attempt to combat, the burdens placed on the people of so-called developing countries by North American political and economic power and practice. I must con-

68 Kanyoro, *ibid*, p. 15.

69 Lorde, Audre, *sister Outsider*, p. 125, 129.

sistently and persistently work within the interfaith community in the US to ensure that the churches do not legitimate American “exceptionalism”. The triumphalism that was so woven into Bush/Reagan policies is deeply rooted in the colonial past and present of the US brand of Christianity.⁷⁰ My actions are an integral part of “walking the talk” of a faith for social transformation.

I walk forward with a smile, dancing with joined arms and efforts - as a scholar and activist, it is not treasonous to laugh!

XV. CLOSING WORDS

In conclusion, then, I call for movement back and forth between movements of women and of women and men of colour, cross-fertilizing ideas, strategies and goals as we co-construct a just world society.

We are called to new non-imperialist beginnings. To deeper insights about a socially radical Jesus, to new cooperations, to emerging theologies. As we are told in II Timothy 1:7, “God did not give us a Spirit of cowardice, but one of strength, of love, and good judgment”. Let us go forth to reconstruct our theologies - and our praxis. I close with the words of US poet June Jordan:

In addition to the traditional concept of true commitment that means you are willing to die for what you think is right, make equal space for the womanly concept of commitment that means you are willing to live for what you believe.

70 I am encouraged by the election recently of Governor Bill Clinton, but do not delude myself that governmental practices will be massively changed.