

Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

A RENEWED CHURCH IN ASIA: IN SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN

- I. The Church in the New Millennium: Learning to be in Solidarity and Dialogue with Women, by Virginia Saldanha
- II. Paradigms for a Feminization of the Church, by John D'Mello
- III. Recommendations of Asian Consultations – Appendices

I. THE CHURCH IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: LEARNING TO BE IN SOLIDARITY AND DIALOGUE WITH WOMEN

by
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THE HOLY SPIRIT ACTIVE AND MOVING THE CHURCH

Thanks to the work of the Spirit ever present in the Church, constantly moving to make "all things new," women have now begun to articulate their experiences of marginalization, oppression and violence done to their whole being by the perpetuation of the traditional image and stereotypes of women as mere "helpers" of man. Thanks also to the many men in the Church who, being open to the Spirit, have helped women find a voice and a platform to make their voice heard. Today in the Church, we have come a long way from women being considered as part of man's possessions, to being recognized (to some extent in theory only) as equal in dignity with men, and all as children of God.

On the momentous occasion of the celebration of the "Jubilee 2000" of Christ's coming into our world, women are optimistic. They are happy to be witnesses to so many liberating changes that have taken place on the Catholic Church during the latter half of this last century of the second millennium. Pope John XXIII, of revered memory, took up the challenge to read and respond to the "signs of the time." One of these was to acknowledge that women were making great strides in the world, that the human race is un-

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dergoing a deep transformation, and "women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling."¹

Reading the signs of the times, Pope John Paul II addressed "The Letter to Women" on the occasion of the 4th World Conference of Women in Beijing, 1995. This was a courageous gesture of our Supreme Pontiff towards women. He addressed the letter to each woman throughout the world as a sign of *solidarity* and gratitude. He referred to the letter as a *dialogue* which begins with a word of thanks, and later goes on to apologize for the various injustices done to women down the ages through the history of the Church. He stated "*May this regret be transformed on the part of the whole Church, into a renewed commitment of fidelity to the Gospel vision.*"² Women in the Church in Asia eagerly await this commitment to the "Gospel vision" and a continuation of the "dialogue" begun by the Holy Father to filter down to the level of the diocese and parish.

The 4th Plenary Assembly of FABC in Tokyo in 1986 addressed the issue of women and acknowledged:

It is therefore, not just a human necessity but a Gospel imperative that the feminine half of the world's population be recognized and their dignity restored, and that they be allowed to play their rightful role in the world and in the Church.

The Church cannot be a sign of the Kingdom and of the eschatological community if the gifts of the Spirit to women are not given due recognition, and if women do not share in the "freedom of the children of God."

And concluded the paragraph on the Plight of Asian Women with the assertion. "The Church could then speak powerfully about the plight of Asian women and become their voice, with an authority unlike any other."³

The FABC Consultation on Women "Realities and Experiences of Women in Asia," in November, 1993, at Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, recommended the setting up of a Women's Commission jointly in the OHD and Office of Laity, and encouraged the national bishops' conferences to do the same, with one of the objectives being "to promote encounters and dialogue between women and men in the Church, especially in decision-making."

The 6th Plenary Assembly of FABC in Manila in 1995 in its final statement reasserted:

An urgent pastoral imperative is for women to exercise their right to coresponsibility and mutuality with men — in society and in the Church.

The formation of the Women's Desk in the Office of Laity of the FABC and the holding of BILA I in 1995, and BILA II in 1998, brought together bishops and women from the countries of Asia to discuss and dialogue on the problems facing women. The bishops listened to the cries of pain of women in Asia, and responded with recommendations to the local churches in the final statements of both these meetings. Responding to the recommendations, some bishops' conferences set up a "Women's Committee/Commission/Desk/Organization" to address the problems of women, as well as to empower them to take their rightful place in Church and society. In many other countries women await this decision to strengthen their efforts to liberate women in Asia from the "tragic realities of Asian women that cry out for transformation."⁴

JESUS' OPENNESS AND DIALOGUE WITH WOMEN

Jesus' example of sensitivity to and concern for women is evident throughout the Gospels. "At times this caused wonder, surprise, often to the point of scandal."⁵

In Luke 13, 10-16, Jesus heals a crippled woman in the synagogue on the Sabbath. There were three significant steps in the healing that we could relate to women in the Church today.

1. The woman was paralyzed. Most women in the Church today are paralyzed by patriarchal attitudes and the resultant stereotyping of women's roles.
2. Jesus calls her up to the front where he stood teaching, and touched her. A touch that healed her. This action of Jesus broke down social barriers which marginalized Jewish women. The actions of calling her up in the synagogue, touching her and talking to her were not allowed and were considered transgressions. But to Jesus the human dignity of the woman was important, and the restoration of that dignity was his concern, not the upholding of ritual laws.
3. Jesus refers to her as a daughter of Abraham, equal in status to the sons of Abraham. This same equality is expressed in Genesis 1, 27, which tells us that God created human beings according to his own image and likeness; male and female he created them.

The Gospels are full of examples of Jesus' interaction with women. They ministered to him; they were among his closest friends; they were his disciples; and first bearers of the Good News of his resurrection. Jesus liberated women from the rigid patriarchal traditions that existed in his time, e.g., when he allowed a woman with the flow of blood to touch him,

and brought her action to public notice. Unfortunately, the strong patriarchal attitudes caught up with the early Christians, and Jesus' liberative message in favor of women was lost down the ages.

The Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* of Pope John Paul II, on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, on the occasion of the Marian Year, is a beautiful document that needs to be well read through by every bishop and pastor in the Church to understand Jesus' attitude to women (Chapter V). There is an urgent need to introduce these attitudes, and re-enforce them in Asian societies, and in the Church as well. This document brings out beautifully Jesus' openness to women. Men in the Church will find in Jesus a good example of what it means to dialogue with women. Jesus includes them in every area of ministry. In his Church women expect the same.

When Jesus speaks to women about the things of God, they understand; there is a true resonance of mind and heart, a response of faith. Jesus expresses appreciation and admiration for this distinctly "feminine" response.⁶

The best example of dialogue is Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the Well (John 4:7-28). Jesus begins by meeting her on a ground that is familiar and comfortable to her, the well. Jesus starts the dialogue with a topic that is familiar to the woman — water, and leads her through a theological discourse on "life giving water." He gently leads her to open up and examine her life in a non-judgemental way. Jesus answers her questions about traditional and true worship. Some interpret this part of the dialogue as the attempt of the woman to "change the topic" of her sinful living, that Jesus has begun. But Jesus goes along with her in the true spirit of "listening," and ultimately helps her to discover the truth. She is transformed by her dialogue with Jesus, and becomes an ardent disciple, bringing many of her townspeople to Jesus.

DIALOGUE WITH WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Dialogue has been God's way of relating to people. Scripture is replete with instances of God speaking to people. Dialogue is necessary and important in any relationship. In the Church we are a community of God's people in relation with each other. Dialogue should be an essential dimension that enhances and builds this relationship. Without dialogue a relationship turns into one of dominance and submission. In families where love and good flourish, there is dialogue that keeps these relationships alive.

Women in the Church have been feeling severely marginalized, as they have never really been drawn into a dialogue, especially when it comes to decision-making in the Church. Even when these decisions concern the very

life and concerns of women! However, the Church has survived because women have remained faithful and obedient — and silent! With the hurtling changes taking place in the world, it is naive to think that these changes are not going to affect the women in the Church. Hence, to expect future generations of women to remain faithful, obedient — and silent — is very short-sighted indeed!

Formation in Dialogue

It is very important to include men at all levels of the Church in the dialogue with women. Special mention should be made of men in priestly formation. These are men who will be ministering to women in parishes at the end of their training. How can they do justice to their ministry if they have never had interaction with women during their years of formation? This can be done by introducing women lecturers into seminaries, having seminars on issues concerning women, and having a healthy interaction, in general, with women. Many are afraid of the "temptation" and "threat" that these suggestions may pose to men in priestly formation. The simple answer to this is that, if a man has a tendency or a weakness to succumb to the attractions of the opposite sex, it is better it shows up in formation than when he has already become a priest and will be interacting with women unsupervised. In the opinion of most women, this excuse to keep women and women's studies out of seminaries is very weak and deforming for men.

A dialogue with women should lead to opening up the sphere of theological reflection to women.

Listening is a Necessary Element in Dialogue

When the Church listens to women, this "listening" should accept the authority of women to speak and articulate their life experiences. Listening does not discount women's experience, or lay down rules and regulations for the speaking of her experiences. This can be a tendency of an all-male hierarchy, that has been carried forward into an all-male tradition, through an all-male interpretation of scripture and tradition, from earliest times, when women were expected to be silent "chattles" in the home and in the Church.

Listening to women is important, as women have their own unique experience of God in their lives, and are able to make valid contributions to theological reflection. A very important dimension of a woman's life which has been left out of theological reflection is that of women as co-creators with God. The whole rich experience of pregnancy, birth and nurturing children, in which, beyond any doubt, God is present and active with woman has in fact been degraded by focusing on the discharge of blood as unclean.

This has had the effect of making women devalue themselves, to look upon these processes as a burden of their biological make-up. The constant reference to this "impurity" in women has had disastrous effects on the mental and physical well-being of women, as well as on their sense of self-worth, when, indeed, these are beautiful experiences of the divine in women's lives. If only these experiences are raised to the level that is their due place, woman will begin to look at herself and her body with a new sense of dignity and respect, and will value these life-giving experiences as precious.

WOMEN ARE PRO-LIFE!

The world's focus on a woman's body is only for exploitation of pleasure and mammon. The Church can contribute immensely to changing this demeaning way of looking at women by focusing on the dignity of woman as co-creator with God, and by dialoguing with women to bring out the richness of these God experiences in their lives. This will also be a valuable way to enhance the pro-life agenda of some organizations, which unfortunately direct their focus negatively to women who are in any way pro-life. It is far more valuable to look deeper into the roots of why anti-life decisions are made by people, and deal with these anti-life attitudes and practices, which push women to the brink, forcing them to make decisions that tear at the very core of their being. Many women, too, are in this so called "pro-life" movement, but they usually belong to the privileged class, and are not in dialogue with women at the grass roots, who live life on the margins, or who are living in cultures that force anti-life decisions upon them. Attitudes towards a woman's body are the product of social conditioning and medical myths which significantly influence woman's decisions about her body.

Made in the image and likeness of God, men and women are whole. They are equal in dignity. If one is denied the rights, opportunities and dignity that are available to the other, the wholeness is eroded. Yet, men and women are different. Women do not deny this difference. It is precisely this difference that makes woman unique. The whole human community needs to be enriched by the complementarity of men and women in governance, decision-making, politics, development, economics, etc. Today we suffer immensely due to the lack of this complementarity and balance, that women can contribute to all spheres of life.

Women have to be empowered to take responsibility for shaping their own destinies, as well as that of the world. The Church has to help women by initiating a dialogue with women. The Church may also need to have the courage to make changes in laws and structures to make this dialogue a genuine reality. This dialogue should be at different levels, at the level of faith, tradition, culture and life. The essential differences between men and women produce life-experiences that are different. Women see things dif-

ferently, feel differently, and make decisions differently. It has not helped humankind to discount women's decisions as inconsequential or emotional. Being rooted in life and the nurturing of life, women's decisions are generally directed to the promotion and preservation of life. Women are naturally endowed with life-enabling characteristics. **WOMEN ARE PRO-LIFE.**

WOMEN AT THE SERVICE OF LIFE

Women can contribute significantly to the promotion and growth of human life, human relations and spiritual values. This has been adequately proved down the ages in woman's role as mother, sister, wife and daughter. But to keep these skills of women confined to the home is to limit the influence and scope of women to enhance life in wider and equally effective areas of political, economic, social, and religious life.

The examples of women heading governments in recent times have often been cited as contrary to the claims of women bringing a life-enhancing perspective into the sphere of public life. It should be noted, however, that such women were either nurtured in politics with a male perspective, and/or chose to toe the male dominant line of thinking to remain in power. Recently, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with the National Treasurer of the Republic of the Philippines, Dr. Leonora Briones, and happily discovered how she brought her womanly, as well as her Christian perspective, to bear upon her work. I found in her an excellent example of a Christian woman in public life, making decisions that were humane and pro-life! Another example is Dr. Yi-Wen Chiang Nieves, a government official of Kaoshiung City, Taiwan, whose witness was published in the June, 1999, newsletter of the FABC Office of Laity. In India we have the Magsaysay Award winner, Dr. Kiran Bedi, a woman police officer, whose impeccable character and performance seemed to trouble rather than satisfy our corrupt politicians and bureaucracy. She was shifted from one "hard" posting to another, sometimes even given what is referred to as a "dump" posting. But wherever she was sent, she gave of her best, and ended up by being in the eye of a storm for the ruffling a lot of feathers in government and out of it. She is characteristically sensitive and humane when dealing with people.

Given the general level of ethics in politics, it is hard for isolated women to do what they would have liked to do for the people. For this reason we need more people, men and women with a feminist and Christian perspective to enter politics. Our educational institutions can help to empower and encourage many more women to enter spheres of public life in order to make a marked difference. This is what Pope John Paul II called the "feminine genius."

It is thus my hope, dear sisters, that you will reflect carefully on

what it means to speak of the "genius of women," not only in order to be able to see in this phrase a special part of God's plan which needs to be accepted and appreciated, but also in order to let this genius be more fully expressed in the life of society as a whole, as well as in the life of the Church.⁷

Baroness Shirley Williams, a Catholic, who has spent fifty years of her life as a leading politician in the United Kingdom, said that the resolution of conflicts is one of the most difficult challenges that the world faces in the next decade. To meet this challenge she suggests we need a new code of conduct, a change in values and a new gospel of peace. This means:

Introducing more values associated with women into society. In countries where women play, alongside men, a very large part in public life, for example, in Scandinavia or Canada, there is consistently a greater interest in conflict resolution and reconciliation than in societies which are still overwhelmingly patriarchal and dominated by traditional male attitudes. Not for nothing has South Africa insisted that at least a third of ANC members of Parliament should be women.⁸

Women's potentialities are being acknowledged and tapped in the world at a faster rate than in the Church, which is losing out on the talents which women want to contribute to the mission and growth of the Church.

WOMEN AND MARY

Women, who are so close to life and in touch with the realities of life in Asia, feel the call to promote life amidst the many life-threatening situations they are faced with. Some examples are the trafficking of women and children for sex tourism; violence that is rooted in the cultural valuation of women below men; and poverty which is driving women to leave their homes and migrate to urban areas or overseas to take up jobs under exploitative and often violent, working conditions. We have the example of Sarah Balabagan, the sixteen-year old Filipino Muslim maid who killed her employer in Saudi Arabia because he attempted to assault and rape her. More recently, Lalitha Oraon, a 19-year old Indian migrant worker for an Indian diplomat in Paris, was sexually mutilated, after which she attempted to kill herself.

Women laboreres are docile and do not unionize easily, so they are excellent material for exploitation and violence. Most commonly it will be observed that they chastise themselves for the wrongs inflicted upon them. According to the Asian Migrant Centre, there are an estimated 4 million legal and illegal contract workers in East and South East Asia alone, and

about half of them are women, who mainly serve as domestic workers and nursemaids. Women migrant workers are often sexually abused by their bosses in their workplaces and by immigration officers or police in detention centers. These women, who struggle for life for themselves and for their families, are an embodiment of endurance and hope, and they proclaim to us the value of life. At the same time they are an indictment of the insensitivity and callousness of those who are comfortably well off and well-positioned in society, and do not hear their cry for justice and liberation.

The experiences of these women, who suffer, and those who struggle with them, often see in Mary a model of a woman who also struggled against many odds in life, but find only the traditional image of Mary of "Virgin," "Queen," and "Mother of God," being offered at church services. These place Mary at a level unreachable to most women. They do not receive any affirmation of their re-imagining of Mary in the context of their experience and reflections on Mary's life. Most women have not heard of Mary as:

Perfect model of the disciples of the Lord... the disciple who works for that justice which sets free the oppressed and for that charity which assists the needy; but above builds up Christ in people's hearts.⁹

Knowing the situation of our times, we cannot speak of Mary as a model of discipleship, without first liberating Mary from the images that have accrued to her through the ages. Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* says:

It should be considered normal for succeeding generations of Christians in differing socio-cultural contexts to have expressed their sentiments about the Mother of Jesus in a way and manner which reflected their own age (MC, 36).

The picture of the Blessed Virgin presented in certain types of devotional literature cannot be easily reconciled with today's lifestyle, especially with the way women live today. In the home, woman's equality and coresponsibility with man in the running of the family are being justly recognized by laws and the evolution of customs. In the sphere of politics, women have in many countries gained a position in public life equal to that of men. In the social field, women are at work in a whole range of different employments, getting further away every day from the restricted surroundings of the home. In the cultural field, new possibilities are opening up for women in scientific research and intellectual abilities.¹⁰

There is much in Mary's life that women can relate to and receive

strength and inspiration from. "Mary's experience of motherhood was not free of trouble, pain and affliction. She was susceptible to threat from "the righteous Joseph and the wretched Herod alike."¹¹

The finding of the boy Jesus in the temple after three grueling days of searching, and the subsequent exchange between him and his parents must have been a trying challenge to Mary's role as mother. She experienced the tensions parents often experience today with their growing children — of allowing them to decide how they will follow God's will in their life.

The call to motherhood is to give life, to nurture life, to promote life to the point of letting go. When mothers are able to set free their children to be their own autonomous selves, they too are set free to be themselves. Mothers need to allow their children to grow up. They teach them to grow from dependence to independence to interdependence. Mothers are able to let go of their children when they are clear about their own identity and dignity as women, when they do not live only in co-dependency with the men in their lives, when they are able to affirm their autonomy.

Mary can truly be an inspiration to women to grow into persons in their own right in their God given dignity. Jesus' challenge to Mary in the gospel (Lk 2:48-50) is a challenge to all mothers.¹²

The traditional images and titles of Mary that are still very much prevalent and popular in the Church, like "Immaculate Conception," "Mother of God," "Queen," "Virgin," etc., are images that are not "in sync" with the reality of our times. These images seem to take Mary out of the reach of women. Whereas the presentation of Mary as the peasant girl of Nazareth, having to deal with her pre-marital conception and consequent rejection by Joseph (Matt 1:19) is more in touch with reality. Her being the mother of Jesus was not a privilege which catapulted her to fame as the "Mother of God." Instead, she was challenged as any other disciple to do the will of God (Mk 3:34). Mary as a model disciple is far more appealing and challenging to people today, especially to women.

DEMOLISH MYTHS AT THE ROOT OF VIOLENCE TO WOMEN

The world has indeed suffered greatly because large sections of women in the world have been undermined and ill-treated. They have been looked at with eyes of lust, greed and dominance. They have been turned into commodities that translate into profit and satiation of lust. Some cultures, in order to "protect" their women, go to the other extreme of controlling and curtailing their freedom to the extent of deforming, and even destroying them, as is being currently done in Afghanistan. Women have to be liber-

ated from both these extremes and treated as equal and responsible human beings. There is a need for a lot of changes to be made in society's attitudes, in cultural and religious traditions, that have been responsible in keeping these extreme views of women in place. The extreme controls exercised over women from early childhood robs them of their self-confidence, and makes them believe that they are weak and necessarily dependent on a man. Many women have suffered grievously because of these false beliefs. They are blindly driven into marriage, cheated of their property and possessions by greedy male relatives, or treated as slaves in the household where they reside, because they feel they have to be protected by a male relative when single or widowed. These women are often sexually harassed and abused by the so-called "male protector."

In the many years of my work as secretary in charge of the women's desk in my home diocese I have come in contact with many women who are suffering from violence in their marriages. This violence has been mental, emotional, and even physical. This is often linked to misconceptions about the marriage relationship, or about the role of the wife in marriage, or just about the wrong idea of a woman as someone weaker and the right of man to get sexual pleasure from woman.

The Church through its many educational institutions can play an important role in implementing changes in the way people think of and treat women.

At the parish level, awareness programs can be conducted for various groups of people. The BECs and SCCs are important instruments through which change can be initiated. They can be even more effective if, as a community, people sit together, and discuss how many social and religious customs and practices can demean and oppress women. Then, as a community, they can come to decisions to effect changes. Change is made easier, if the decision for change is taken jointly as a community, and the change receives the support of the community. This is an important way in which the Church can initiate dialogue and stand in solidarity with women.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

"God willed that there should be a relationship of profound communion between man and woman, in a perfect reciprocity of knowledge and of the giving of self" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 371).

God created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be a "helpmate" to the other, for they are equal as persons and complementary as masculine and feminine (ibid. 372).

Reciprocity and complementarity are the two fundamental characteristics of the human couple. We need to return to this plan, to proclaim it forcefully, so that women, in particular, who have suffered more from its failure to be fulfilled can finally give full expression to their womanhood and their dignity.¹³

Women who are aware of their rights, and wish to give expression to their dignity, often run into trouble, because the larger community is lacking a similar awareness, and such women are tormented, instead of being affirmed and supported. When these women assert their rights within marriage, and try to work out a relationship that is based on "reciprocity" and "complementarity," they are accused of trying to break up the marriage. The Church has to consider seriously to invest more in the training of couples for marriage. Marriage is sacred, and so important for the nurture and growth of life and faith of future generations. Yet there is hardly any investment at all in preparing men and women to undertake this very important life task. Men have to be made aware of the Church' teachings regarding the complementarity of the marital relationship, as well as the dignity of the woman.

Domination indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and the woman possess in the "unity of the two": and this especially to the disadvantage of the woman... While the violation of this equality, which is both a gift and a right deriving from God the Creator, involves an element to the disadvantage of the woman, at the same time it also diminishes the true dignity of the man.¹⁴

The awareness that in marriage there is mutual subjugation out of reverence for Christ, and not just that of wife for husband, must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behavior and customs. This is a call which does not cease to challenge future generations. The challenge presented by the "ethos" of the Redemption is clear and definitive. All reasons in favor of the "subjection" of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of the "mutual subjection" of both "out of reverence for Christ."¹⁵

Unfortunately, many read St. Paul's exhortation to wives to "submit to your husbands as to the Lord..." (Eph 5:22), and understand it in a very literal sense as a relationship of subjugation of the woman, and not as mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21).

SUPPORT STRUCTURES TO AID THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Change is a necessary process of growth, and, therefore, our approach to changes in the gender equation should be positive.

In the process of change in the status of woman, which is taking place in the world, there are many casualties. Women and men react negatively to these changes. It does not mean that we reject change, and so reverse the process, as some have been trying to do. Instead, it would be prudent to provide support systems to help the victims of these casualties. There are cases of violence, false accusations especially, when women leave the home to participate in social and civic life, or take up a job outside the home, and marital/family break-up occurs as a consequence.

Women and men with a stable background of vision and faith should be trained as counselors to assist these victims. religious congregations should be encouraged to take up a mission to women who are victims of various kinds of violence. We have too few centers for victims of violence, which is one very great need of the hour. Women should not be left to languish in situations of violence, or deprived of shelter, since this can have serious negative impacts on her life and that of her children. How can a mother be expected to bring up and nurture children with love and concern, if she herself is subjected to violence? It is likely that this violence will be transferred to the children, setting in motion a spiral of systemic violence.

The Christian family also builds up the kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life. It is thus in the love between husband and wife and between members of the family, a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness — that the Christian family's participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of his Church finds expression and realization. Therefore, love and life constitute the nucleus of the saving mission of the Christian family in the Church and for the Church.¹⁶

When there is violence, love and life will be absent. How can women, who are victims of violence (mental, emotional or physical) be able to contribute positively to the well-being of life and the growth of children in the family?

The issue of violence in the family has to be seriously taken note of, and addressed in a concerted way, for prevention of, as well as for the handling, of casualties, if the Christian family is to fulfil its mission in society.

The number of continued support-systems for men and women in family life is also negligible. With the exception of the priest in the parish being available for counseling and guidance, people usually have no one to turn to. Many turn to undesirable means or persons for help. Even the priest, by

virtue of his very academic formation, is usually not the most competent person for such support. Or even if there is a priest who is trained and competent, his parish work, and the sheer numbers in his parish, will limit him. Teams of men and women have to be trained for this special kind of pastoral work. Women who have the experience, or who have been trained, should minister to women. Religious women will be relevant and competent in this area only if they have some experience of life in the outside world.

FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL PROBLEMS

In the multi-religious context of Asian society we have to accept the reality of mixed marriage. The Catholic partner often struggles to keep her/his faith, and to transmit it to her/his children. At the same time, the Church has to accept that the married partner, out of love for his/her spouse, will respect the religious beliefs of the spouse, instead of coercing him/her to convert to Catholicism. The spouse has to be encouraged to enrich their marriage with inter-religious dialogue, which can also enrich the Church in Asia. Space should be provided in the Church for couples of mixed marriages, to meet each other, share religious beliefs, and support each other in the ups-and-downs of mixed marriages. (We need not think that such couples necessarily have more of these up-and-downs than do other couples who are both Catholic! These problems may just be different.)

The number of divorced and separated couples is on the increase. The women in such broken marriages suffer immensely, not only because of social attitudes, but also by reason of the consequences of their situation. They suffer because of economic hardships, legal entanglements associated with the marriage break-up — which in itself can be very traumatic — lack of shelter, or even continued harassment from the separated spouse. There is absolutely no pastoral outreach to victims of these broken marriages. Again, some sort of support system has to be worked out at the parish or diocesan level to give short-term shelter, legal help and counseling to such women and men.

With the current pressures on families due to the economic crisis, there is often an increase in alcoholism among men, and consequent violence to women and children. Even in the absence of alcoholism, women have been subjected to torture because of the male's wrong attitudes to their marriage/sexual relationship. Women have been forced to hide with their children away from home to escape life-threatening violence. Often, women have no place to go. The resultant physical, mental and emotional damage done to the woman and children is traumatic. We need to have residences for temporary shelter for women, with counseling and legal services. Religious women can be encouraged to provide such services to women. The establishment of a Women's Commission in dioceses can coordinate these services.

THE ASIAN CHURCH IN SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN

The recommendations of the consultation the First and Second Bishops' Institutes on Women in the Church (BILA I and II), (cf. Appendix III below) are proposed for implementation, as a way for the Church in Asia to be truly in solidarity with women.

The social teachings of Pope John Paul II on women can be used to change attitudes, and to challenge the oppressive elements in cultures and social traditions that have caused women to suffer. These documents have to be provided not only to women for their study, and to reflect upon, but also to men. Catholic men have to join women in bringing about liberative changes in cultural and religious practices that are life-threatening to girl-children and women.

Unless the Church steps in to encourage the women's movements in Asia, the liberation of women from evil practices like the dowry, female foeticide/infanticide, incest, molestation, rape and trafficking of women, etc., will remain a distant dream for them. The Church can through its various institutions which serve people help to create an awareness of religious, cultural, political, and economic structures that oppress women in the home, at work, in society, and so work to promote the God-given dignity and equality of women.

Our educational institutions must be motivated to work for the empowerment of girls, by making them aware of their rights, and then how to assert themselves when their rights are trampled upon. At the same time, we have to work towards creating a gender-sensitivity in boys, if we are genuinely interested in social transformation. Girls have to be helped to realize their dignity as autonomous human beings, able to function as persons in their own right, and to grow to their full God-given potential. They should be encouraged to take up political careers, working from a truly feminine perspective which is life-oriented and life-enabling.

Efforts have to be made to draw women into parish and diocesan pastoral councils, by arranging meetings times suitable to women, by providing creche facilities for women with young children, and community care for these children. Similarly, child-care facilities should be provided or encouraged at the community level to help women take up theological studies, pastoral work, social work, or any other work, for which they have the talent and skill and could be fulfilling to them.

To strengthen families the Church has to think seriously in terms of a comprehensive pre-marriage preparation program, beginning in high school, with at least a week of intensive inputs immediately preceding marriage, to

promote wife-husband relationships which are based on mutual respect, shared parenthood and equal partnership, particularly in decision-making, family finance and domestic work. The present tensions experienced in marriages are due to the fact that women are aware of their rights, and feel the need to assert them, while the men are often stuck with the image of the male as the sole authority in the home. These programs could be on-going through marriage.

The Church should be invited to enter into a genuine dialogue with women in order to understand the need to use gender-sensitive language. I appeal to the male hierarchy to understand how many women feel sitting in the Church, while constantly being addressed by the male pronoun. It can give us a feeling of not being taken into account, or of being treated as non-existent, unimportant, and this adds to the already diminished self-image many women have of themselves.

The Catholic Catechism (370) tells us that God is neither male nor female. We also know that both man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God. In our human attempts to comprehend a loving God we have attributed to God images that are taken from our human concepts of love and perfection, which include qualities of both man and woman. Our language of God, therefore, is analogical. The use of all-male designations and symbols to describe God has had the effect of catapulting the male into a dominant position of being "ruler," and "head," in every sphere of life, and has had a demeaning effect on women. Though women from privileged backgrounds may not fully understand or feel the negative impact of the attitudes which arise from male domination, the average working-class woman suffers much from it. Scripture gives us both male and female images of God. People should be left free to use whichever image with which they can best identify with God. Someone remarked: "How can a child relate to God as a loving father, when the child has a drunken father who disrupts family life through violence?"

Lastly, and most importantly, Attention needs to be drawn to the recommendations made at the several FABC-sponsored consultations. Religious women and lay women have been struggling to implement these recommendations to the extent they can, but they are greatly handicapped without the active support of the hierarchy and clergy. The attitude that women's problems and clergy should be dealt with wholly by women cannot hold when it comes to allocating space, resources and personnel for the work of liberating and empowering women, as these resources are largely under the control of the Church authorities.

CONCLUSION

With fervent hope in the spirit of reconciliation with which we have begun the new millenium we pray that Church authority will be moved to concrete action in favor of women. In the spirit of reconciliation we hope the Church will LISTEN, and respond to the voices of women often hitherto spoken of as "rebels," by genuinely understanding the true message of their cries.

Through the true spirit of reconciliation, all women hope that they will be recognized as equal partners in the mission and ministry of the Church. Through the spirit of reconciliation, we hope that no woman will still feel devalued, not taken seriously, uncomfortable as a woman in the Catholic Church, which walks in the footsteps of Jesus, who showed us the Way, the Light and the Truth to true Human Liberation.

May Mary our model of discipleship, woman of courage, and woman of action, inspire and be with the Church of Asia in our journey towards fullness of life for all the peoples of Asia.

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FOOTNOTES

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- 2 Letter to Women from Pope John Paul II, 3.
- 3 FABC IV Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, Final Statement. "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity," nos. 3.3.3, 5 and 6.
- 4 *Ibid.*, no. 3.3.1.
- 5 *M.D.*, no. 12.
- 6 *M.D.*, no. 15.
- 7 *M.D.*, no. 10.
- 8 *The Tablet*, August 14, 1999, extract from the address delivered by Shirley William's at the Catholics in Public Life Conference, in Liverpool.
- 9 Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, no. 37.
- 10 *Ibid.*, no. 24.
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II. PARADIGMS FOR A FEMINIZATION OF THE CHURCH

by
JOHN D'MELLO

I. NEED FOR A PARADIGM

In the year 1950, a year or two after the assassination of Gandhi, the whole of India was raving about Gandhian views and Gandhian ideals: the principle of village self-sufficiency, the principle of bread labor, *Swadeshi*, vegetarianism, simple living, etc. It was then that the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, also caught up in this wave of Gandhism, decided to print all his correspondence on hand-made paper. Confiding this to Dr. Kishore Mushroowalla, the Director of the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Dr. Mushroowalla advised him as follows: "Don't do this! In order to print on hand-made paper, you will have to buy special paper, special ink, special equipment, and you will have to train a whole set of workers to use this machinery." "Instead," he said, "take off your brain and put on a Gandhian brain, put on a Gandhian way of thinking, a Gandhian mentality, and then perhaps all the principles and policies of Gandhi will flow automatically." In other words, take care of the vision, the paradigm: practical policies and implications will take care of themselves.

Much the same can be said of the phenomenon of the subordination of women and the difficulty of male-female partnership within the Church. The real problem is the paradigm, the thinking, the mentality. *At the present time the paradigm, both in society and the Church, continues to be androcentric or patriarchal.* What we need is a widening of our horizons, a broadening of our understanding and vision. What we need is a "feminization of the Church," or put more simply, we need a People of God with an increasing feminist consciousness. The term "feminization of the Church" might sound strange to some ears. even though today expressions like "feminization of the Church" might sound strange to some ears, even though today expressions like "feminization of the work force" are quite popular. In this paper, however, by "feminization" is not meant a Church with a "feminine" face, or a Church with feminine characteristics, nor even a Church with a more "visible female presence" (just as previously for 2,000 years we had a masculine or male-dominated Church), but by "*feminization*" is meant a process whereby the Church acquires an egalitarian, mutually respectful, cosmopolitan, cross-cultural consciousness. It is only then that there will be a true discipleship of equals and an end to all forms of discrimination, not just the discrimination based on gender. Only then will there be no more

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distinctions between Jew or Greek, slave or free person, male or female. Only then shall we attain the oneness in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28).

From the literature of the women's movement I can visualize five paradigms for such a feminization of the Church; all paradigms are heuristically constructed and none of them are strictly exclusive. Overlapping between them is quite possible.

II. THE FIVE PARADIGMS

The Complementary Paradigm: "Equal" but Complementary

1. According to this paradigm, women are not the fairer sex, the weaker sex, but the complementary sex. Taking its cue from Genesis that God created human beings male and female, this paradigm shows that men need women just as much as women need men. They complement each other. This might sound nice in theory, but in practice such thinking leads to a two-nature anthropology, a vision of human beings as divided into two different kinds, each with identifiable differences that become normative for the sex (Mary Aquin O'Neill, "The Mystery of Being Human Together" in *Freeing Theology*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, San Francisco: Harper, 1993, 149). Thus males have a whole set of unique characteristics, and females have another whole set of complementary characteristics. Men are supposed to be, by nature, active, rational, willful, assertive, aggressive, autonomous beings, whose direction goes outward into the world; while women are passive, intuitive, emotional, caring, compassionate, connected beings, whose natural inclination is inward. This bipolar vision of the sexes leads to an equally bipolar understanding of their respective place, namely, the world and the home (Elizabeth Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place*, New York: Del, 1971). Men are to go out and work, be the breadwinner; while household tasks are reserved for women — child care and looking after the home (cf. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 19). In reality, men have decided the model and the roles in this model. Once the assignments are made, women are supposed to complement the role of men. "Women," they say, "is a companion for man!"

The Equality Paradigm: Equal as Sameness

According to this paradigm, women demand equal rights, or the same rights that men have previously appropriated. This is a paradigm that arose out of the early women's movement in Britain and the U.S., a movement which was associated with the right of franchise and the right to education. Thus, if previously men were allowed to vote, women should now be allowed to vote. If men are allowed to be Presidents, women too ought to have the right to be President. If men have a football team, women too ought to

have the right to have their own football team. If men have a right to ordination, women should not be disallowed. In other words, for this group, women should have the "same" rights as men.

The Sisterhood Paradigm: Equal but Separate

According to this thinking, women as a group must stick together and form their own sisterhood. Men find it hard to understand their problems, their experiences — so the only way is for women to come together and develop their own consciousness, their own models, their own strategies to defend their rights. Thus, women have spoken in terms of leaving the male-dominated Church and forming their own Church, or having a separate Bible and a separate lectionary. Their point is that women need to have an exodus from the male-dominated Church (Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women Church: Theology and Practice*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988:57-9, and Denise Lardner Carmody, *Virtuous Woman*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992:125-30.) (It is to be emphasized that both authors do not really advocate separatism. They are only speaking of "temporarily" or "methodologically" being apart.) In order to experience their liberation, they need to stay apart from this Church, reflect on their experiences, and theologize imaginatively to come up with their own symbols and expressions. Others feel that sisterhood groups are still not homogeneous in their thinking. There is no universal sisterhood. They point to several women who have absorbed androcentric values and cultures, for instance, mothers-in-law who continue to inflict violence on their daughters-in-law.

The Difference Paradigm: Equal but Different

According to this paradigm, women are different from men, not just in their way of thinking, but even in their mode of being. There is an epistemological difference, which is based on an ontological difference. Women and men are not only different in their ways of thinking and acting but in their very being. Thus, there are different norms for men and for women. At present, however, the norms are decided by men, while women are supposed to fit these norms. If they do not, they are considered to be inferior or inadequate. (Just as IQ measures are culturally based — youth from an urban culture are not more intelligent than youth from a rural background: their intelligence is *different*). For example, the standards of good health, the criteria of "wellness" are framed according to male norms. Women naturally do not fit these norms; hence they are declared unwell, or less than healthy. Descriptions of women as "often having headaches!", or ascribing most problems of women to their feminine state, or caricaturing their problems as being manufactured in the mind, are typical examples of modes of thinking which do not respect differences between the sexes. Feminists that hold fast to this "difference" paradigm assert that women should develop

their own norms and standards. This paradigm leads to plurality, since the problems and issues of Third World women are quite different from those of First World women.

Solidarity Paradigm: Equal but in Solidarity

This is a paradigm that arises typically from Asian cultures and encompasses elements from the other paradigms. In this paradigm the issues of women, peasants, workers, dalits, tribals and ecology are all connected. There is an interface and interaction between sexism, racism, casteism, colonialism, fundamentalism, environmental destruction and violence. Patriarchy is not just domination of females by males, but an entire socio-cultural-political system of graded subjugations and dominations (Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "For Women in Men's Worlds: A Critical Feminist Theology of Liberation," *Concilium*, 1984, no. 171,34.) In this Asian paradigm, not only is the question of male domination, caste and class addressed in an integrated way, but the over-all question of the transformation of society is also addressed. Thus, the Asian paradigm is not just addressing the question of equal rights only, but envisaging a fundamentally different perspective on each and every issue and aspect of society (Gabriele Dietrich, in "South Asian Feminist Theory and its Significance for Feminist Theology," *Concilium*, 1996/1, 103.) For instance, when Vandana Shiva conceptualizes women's subsistence production, she connects it with a spirituality of reconciliation with Mother Earth, and at the same time makes a scathing criticism of Western science and technology as patriarchal and colonial. In other words, issues of feminism are connected with issues of consumerism and competitiveness (Vandana Shiva, in *Staying Alive: India, Ecology and Survival in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988).

Further, feminist theology in South Asia finds itself in a situation where Christianity is a small minority religion. Hence, feminist religion must contend with issues of fundamentalism and communalism. The question of violence must be dealt with in an integrated way which does not allow neat boundaries between domestic violence, public "rowdiness," communal and caste violence, and ethnic warfare. Violence must be analyzed in all its interlinkages (Gabriele Dietrich, in "South Asian Feminist Theory and its Significance for Feminist Theology," in *Concilium*, 1996/1:109). Feminism is not an autarchic entity but a way of thinking that develops connections between social forces, and allows for the analysis of the linkages between class, caste, gender and race.

Having made a survey of the five paradigms, my next question is: Which is the most appropriate paradigm for theological thinking in the Church? To arrive at my answer, I need to make a quick survey of the contemporary situation.

III. CHOOSING A PARADIGM: A SURVEY OF THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

At the present time economic globalization is spreading its tentacles in Asia relentlessly, and with it come liberalization and unbridled expansion of the market forces. The World Bank, IMF (International Monetary Fund), and WTO (World Trade Organization) are extending their powers, and the 80-odd developing countries that have been forced to accept their structural adjustment programs are experiencing two consequences:

- an ever-widening gap between the wealthy and the marginalized;
- oppressive conditions for vulnerable sections of the population, like women, children, the old and the unemployed.

Along with economic expansion, there is also the globalization of culture. Fewer and fewer companies are controlling TV channels and the media. The world is experiencing a McDonaldization of culture; and by this I mean not the expansion of fast-food restaurants all over the world, but the bombardment of TV channels with values from a hegemonistic First World culture. The treatment of woman as a commodity is becoming universalized. At a more subtle level, we see the growth of the cosmetic industry, with the parallel and associated rise of beauty competitions, where model/winners are more and more chosen from the developing countries to propagandize these products. At a more direct level, we are witnesses to continuous trafficking in young girls, and growing violence against women.

A third alarming phenomenon of the present situation is the rise of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism, with its increasingly centralizing and hierarchical form of control, has tremendous negative repercussions for women and the egalitarian enterprise. The laws in Pakistan are an example, of which the "blasphemy law" in particular is typical.

From this brief survey of the contemporary Asian scene, we arrive at the conclusion that discriminating against women is linked to the discrimination of other marginalized groups; and, therefore, a feminist consciousness cannot be closed in on itself, but will necessarily broaden and encompass the perspectives of other oppressed groups in society. In other words, the optimal paradigm for Asian society is the solidarity paradigm.

IV. THE SOLIDARITY PARADIGM: CONSEQUENCES FOR THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

Given the fact that we wish to opt for a solidarity paradigm, how do we develop a theological consciousness that fosters this paradigm of feminization of the Church? How do we develop a feminist consciousness that is in solidarity with other powerless people? The first step would be a reinterpretation of Scripture, a re-fashioning of theology, and a reconstruction of the Liturgy to include women's experiences and perspectives.

A. Feminist Approaches to the Bible, Theology and Liturgy

Bible Interpretation

The Bible offers images, symbols, stories and passages that inspire, motivate and influence. Unfortunately, there are also many images of women in the Bible which enhance models of women as submissive and subordinate, rather than as independent and assertive.

Feminist theologians, taking their cue from Liberation Theology, have developed a method of doing theology and interpreting the Bible. Schussler Fiorenza calls it a "critical liberation method" (Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "For Women in Men's Worlds: A Critical Feminist Theology of Liberation," in *Concilium*, 1984 no. 171, 34-5). It starts with a woman's experience of oppression, from which a critique of the traditional interpretation is made. This is followed by the retrieval and recovery of woman's histories and woman's insights. The last step is imaginative reconstruction (Anne Carr, "The New Vision of Feminist Theology," in LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology*, 9-13).

Thus, Biblical scholars have critiqued the traditional construction of symbols and personages of the Bible, and recovered for us new insights about these persons. One clear example is the traditional construction of the image of Mary Magdalene as prostitute and sinner. Feminist scholars have shown that she was, in fact, none of these things. It was Gregory the Great (540-604 CE), who mistakenly identified Mary Magdalene with the sinner in Lk 7:36-50, and with Mary of Bethany in Jn 12:1-8, and understood the seven devils of Lk 8:1-3 to be the seven capital sins. As a result, Mary Magdalene was cast into the role of Eve, sinner, weak woman, given to the flesh, given to crying, waster of perfume, temptress, prostitute, so as to more strongly contrast with her conversion patterned on the new Eve, pure, chaste, holy, forgiven much because she loved much. In many countries, Magdalene houses were opened to cater to the rehabilitation of repentant prostitutes. The story of the unknown woman in Mt (26:6-13) and Mk (14:3-9) is constructed merely as a story of conversion, repentance and forgiveness (John D'Mello in *Neythri (Women Leader)*, August 1997, Bangalore: CCWI).

The research of feminist scholars has uncovered new insights about the unknown woman who anointed Jesus. They highlight her boldness and courage to gatecrash into a house full of men in a society where women were considered inferior. The earlier tradition also failed to notice the fact that she is the first woman to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (through the symbolic gesture of anointing with perfume), at a time when the apostles, including Peter, misunderstood or were openly sceptical of the nature of his

messiahship. That is why Jesus gives her one of the greatest compliments he could give to any disciple: "Wherever the gospel is proclaimed... you will always be remembered." As for Mary Magdalene, far from being a sinner or prostitute, she is one of the foremost women disciples, a primary witness of both the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, or even more, the "Apostle to the Apostles," as the Eastern Church is still wont to venerate her (John D'Mello, in *Neythri* (Woman Leader) March 1997, Bangalore: CCWI). Thus, feminist scholarship has recovered new symbols and archetypes of courage and discipleship for women.

Theology

A second big area which can lead to the feminization of the Church is theology. A paradigm shift in theology is called for. At present, most theology taught in seminaries and in lay theology courses tends to be androcentric or patriarchal in its assumptions. Most importantly, although women are allowed to study the Bible and theology, they are generally not appointed to teaching positions in theology in Catholic seminaries.

The critical liberative method has given us, for instance, a whole new understanding in Mariology. Mary is one of the powerful and popular symbols of Christian piety and spirituality. The three symbols of traditional Mariology have been that of virgin, mediatrix, and the new Eve. Since Mary is the type and model for all disciples, these symbols have been used again and again to shape the Christian disciple's notions of sexuality (as sexlessness and denigration of the body), of the subordinate position of woman, and of woman as temptress (the old Eve in contrast to the new Eve). Theologians with "a feminist soul" insist that we need to recover the image of Mary as a woman of independence and courage, symbol of motherhood, and a sister in suffering and oppression (Maurice Hamington, *Hail Mary*, London: Routledge, 1995). Likewise, Rosemary Radford Ruether and others have pointed out the inadequacies of a patriarchal "kingly" Christology that stresses the "maleness" of Christ. She proposes "androgynous" and "spirit" Christologies (Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, London: SCM; 1983). Fiorenza suggests that:

...a Christology that is silent about the socio-political causes of Jesus' execution, and stylizes him as the paradigmatic sacrificial victim whose death was either willed by God or necessary to propitiate God, continues the kyriarchal cycle of violence and victimization, rather than empower believers for resisting or transforming it (Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Introduction" to *Violence against Women*, *Concilium*, 1994/1, xvi).

Feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson illustrates how understanding

Jesus as Sophia—the Wisdom of God—can be very enriching for Christology. Sophia is a feminine image that was very much in use in early Christianity. The term was used by Paul, John, and implicitly by Matthew. It enables us to apply the rich Wisdom tradition to our understanding of Christ. The Wisdom tradition—which was very emphatic about justice, was respectful of other religions and cultures, and concerned about the entire universe—broadens our understanding of Christology, and gives it a comprehensive and inclusive flavor (Elizabeth Johnson "Redeeming the Name of Christ," in LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology*, 120-34).

The Liturgy

Another sphere that is important for building feminist consciousness is the sphere of the liturgy. The Church is an agency of socialization. Through its liturgies it shapes the values, ideals, norms and conscience of its disciples, especially the young.

Unfortunately, the women's role in the liturgy is sidelined. I am not merely referring to the fact that women cannot be ordained, or that many countries have not yet adopted the inclusive language lectionary, but I am referring to the "shadow" role that women characters play in the lectionary readings, and the portrait of women that appears therefrom.

In a study of the *Common Lectionary*, Marjorie Proctor Smith found only 14 per cent of significant references to women in the liturgical readings. Another 6 per cent were peripheral references. Women are included only in so far as they relate to male characters, not regarded as actors in their own right. Mostly they are expendable. For instance, while the Confession of Peter is read in all three years of the cycle in all synoptic parallels, the Messianic Anointing by a Woman found in Mt and Mk, at the beginning of the Passion, is read only once in three years, though it could just as appropriately be called a Confession of Jesus (Marjorie Proctor Smith, "Image of Women in the Lectionary," *Concilium*, Dec. 1985, 60).

It could be argued that women were not very visible or active in the Biblical era, and the Bible simply reflects this regrettable fact. But it is the function of a lectionary to be selective, rather than representative. We need to recall and celebrate women of our biblical heritage, in whom God has been made manifest, and through whom God has worked: the stories of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, of Miriam and Deborah, of Jael and Judith, of Abigail, Vashti, Naomi and Ruth, of Shiprah and Puah, of the wise woman of Tekoa and of Huldah the prophet, of the women missionaries, leaders and disciples of the New Testament. We need to recall also "texts of terror" (Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror. Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1985)—stories of struggle,

violence and suffering, stories of the rape, betrayal, abuse and murder of women, which also belong to the biblical heritage. They are part and parcel of the stories of women of today. The secondary position that women characters play in the liturgy reinforces her secondary position in society.

B. Network Theology, Interdisciplinary Theology, Planetary Theology

A second step in enhancing an egalitarian and cosmopolitan consciousness in the Church is to develop a broad-based theology. A feminist theology is not limited to women's interests and questions, but is related to other theologies and the self-reflection of other oppressed groups. By insisting on the importance of "wholeness" as a basic category in theology, feminist theology opens itself out to other streams of liberation theology. One might say feminist theology flows into "planetary theology" (Tissa Balasuriya, "Why Planetary Theology," in *Third World Liberation Theologies*, ed. Deane William Ferm, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990)—to use an expression coined by Tissa Balasuriya. Feminist theology becomes the starting point for other liberation theologies, for inter-disciplinary theologies, and for a network of contextualized theologies.

*While feminist theology liberates theology from androcentric assumptions and patriarchal thinking, and imaginatively reconstructs theology from a mutually respectful point of view, ecological theology liberates theology from a humano-centric perspective (a perspective that views humans as the sole focus of theology), and reconstructs theology from a cosmocentric perspective (where the entire cosmos, including plants and animals, earth and oceans, become the focus of the theological viewpoint). When these two perspectives are combined, we have an *Eco-feminist Theology*, which not only combines the concerns of feminism with the concern of ecology based on the striking parallels between the rape of the earth and the rape of women, but reacquires feminist styles of living and thinking as the only means for preserving environmental sanity.

*Again, inter-religious theology frees traditional theology from a narrow-minded vision which considers the Roman Catholic Church as "containing the fullness of truth" (the Church as identified with the Kingdom of God), pushing it to broader pluralistic horizons, where truth is sought in other religions as well (the Kingdom of God is larger than the Church), thus enabling us to learn from other religious traditions. When this theology is combined in the inter-religious perspective, we develop *Religious Environmentalism*, which focuses on an inter-religious perspective in preserving the environment, and is concerned with the symbols and stories that Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and other religions have to offer on the question of ecological preservation.

*Likewise, Dalit, Minjung and similar theologies combine with feminist perspectives to produce other contextualized Third World theologies, which liberate traditional theology from its First World, supposedly "universalistic" viewpoint, and construct theologies of struggle that celebrate the world views of oppressed, Third World women's groups.

*Moral Theology for a global world: Above all, the feminist solidarity perspective stimulates theology to take on a global character. This point can be elaborated with the example of moral theology. The solidarity paradigm provokes a radical recasting of the moral discourse. By insisting on "no separation" between the personal and the political, feminist philosophy is pushing for a movement from an individualistic, casuistic type to a collective, communitarian form of ethics. It is asking that ethical discourse move from the private and personal sphere, and include the public sphere of politics and economics. The ethical discourse has to be a critique of political and economic decisions and policies, an exercise in questioning the values behind them, since these are the policies affecting vulnerable groups like women.

At the present time ethics/moral theology is largely concerned with the actions, intentions and motives of individuals. There are schools of business ethics pre-occupied with ethical decision-making, wrong practice, behavior, and the morality of individuals. They are scarcely concerned with the very structure of the company, its policies, its organizations of authority, its laws, the functioning of its board, its attitude towards workers, its expansionist tendencies. Focusing only on the actions and intentions of individuals is like a river flowing to the ocean carrying sewage water. One may plant a few trees along the river banks, one might make the route a little more scenic—but basically the river is left untouched and the dirty water flows as before (John D'Mello, "Towards the Promotion of Ethical Culture," paper presented at the 1998 Copenhagen Conference on Social Progress, Denmark, 1998 (forthcoming publication by Danida: Copenhagen). The ethical discourse, instead of merely discussing the behavior of individual executives and politicians, should focus on the very structure of multinational and transnational companies, the big financial institutions, the IMF, the WB and the WTO, their policies and the power controlling them.

The press is concerned about the lies that Clinton tells in his private life, but is not concerned with the lies that he may tell with regard to U.S. interference in other countries. The world is concerned with the private morality of a U.S. President, but it is scarcely concerned with the fact that the U.S. is one of the biggest defaulters on its United Nations dues; and this is a moral issue affecting millions of vulnerable people, including women.

Recently, in connection with the Intellectual Property Rights, the WTO passed a law on patents to defend the so-called 'individual' rights of discov-

erers and inventors. This is an iniquitous law. Take the patenting of *neem*, for example. For over 1,500 years Indian farmers and Indian women were using *neem*-based pesticides and medicines. Recently however, a few Japanese and American firms, one of which is W.R. Grace, have filed patents on formulae for *neem*-based solutions, emulsions and *neem*-based toothpaste. W.R. Grace has set about manufacturing and commercializing the product by establishing a base in India. As a result of India being forced to sign the IPR Treaty, under the WTO regime, Indian farmers and housewives have now to pay "royalties" to W.R. Grace for buying a product that they had been using for centuries (Vandana Shiva, "Science, Ecology and Human Rights," in *Human Wrongs*, Penang: Just World Trust, 1996, 155). The ethical issue at bottom is the structure of the IPR treaty. Individual ethics would find no fault with the IPR treaty, in fact, would encourage it; but a structural, communitarian ethics would reject it totally, as being heavily biased against the poor housewives of developing countries.

Likewise, the morality of environmental issues has not been sufficiently dealt with in our moral theologies. The United Nations has ranked nations according to three indices: a per capita income index, a poverty line index, and a human development index. Perhaps, it also needs to come up with an ethical index, that concerns itself with women's rights, energy consumption, and other Third World issues. Just as the IMF wishes to maintain report cards on those developing countries that are defaulting in their balance of payments, so also another agency needs to be empowered to keep track of the greenhouse gas emissions of transnational and developed countries. This is equally a moral issue, even though the moral agent in this regard is an institution. Thus, the feminist consciousness compels theology to become more global in its scope and problematic.

C. The Involvement of the Church in Micromovements

Finally, a third step in the feminization of the Church would be the latter's increasing role as an agent of civil society. At the present time the spaces of civil society are being usurped by market forces or by the State. Churches, along with non-government organizations, have an important role to play in safeguarding the territory of civil society.

Following from this, an essential quality of Christian discipleship in today's world is to be part of a counter-cultural micro-movement. These are participatory people's movements that have come out of the struggles of peoples. These are not macro-processes, but often they are grassroots projects that are confined to a particular locality or a few villages. Sometimes they operate in several villages, multiply and involve large movements (Ponna Wignaraja, "Re-thinking Development and Democracy," in *New Social Movements in the South*, London: Zed Books, 1993). These movements have been attempting to better and enrich impoverished human relations,

trying to turn the tide set by the process of globalization. Thus, the fishermen's forum, the cooperatives for landless laborers, the forum on violence against women, women against alcohol, anti-moneylenders groups, environmental organizations, women against dowry, youth groups, lawyers' collectives, judicial activists, etc. There are over 250,000 Non-Government Organizations in the world (Julie Fisher, *NGOs and the Political Development of the World*, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1998), and many of these agents of civil society (though not all) have been making quiet transformations in the intersitial spaces of society. Some have been openly campaigning against issues, and some have even started to influence the State and transnational organizations. These are people's movements. They are nondenominational, inter-religious movements. These micro-movements are crucial for women's empowerment. The aim of the micro-movements is not to gain publicity, to capture power, or to be in the limelight, but only to bring about structures that are more just. These movements form part of the "dialogue of life and action." They are movements that are performing a veritable service to life. Many would call them signs of the action of the Holy Spirit. If the Church wishes to feminize itself—and by this I mean develop a mutually respectful consciousness—one sure way is to be part of the wave of micro-movements that are slowly and gradually gaining momentum in the Two-Thirds World, and are a powerful antidote to the evil effects of globalization.

In this post-modern society, feminization of the Church—or the development of an egalitarian, cosmopolitan, global consciousness—is not an option any more. It is a condition of survival that echoes the well-known maxim: "Think globally and act locally!"

III. RECOMMENDATION OF ASIAN CONSULTATIONS

APPENDIX I

Recommendations of the Consultation on Women: "Realities and Experiences of Women in Asia," held at Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, November 4-8, 1993.

A. That the FABC:

1. Sponsor an Asian-level conference on the "Role of Women in the Church and in Society Towards the Third Millennium," in 1995 to:
 - 1.1 Deal with gender issues;
 - 1.2 Invite women for consciousness raising;
 - 1.3 Discover women's spirituality and feminist theology;
 - 1.4 Reflect and discover the feminine perspective of the Bible;
 - 1.5 Network among women's groups—among religious women and between religious women and lay women.

2. To promote partnership between women and men in the family, in the Church and in society.
3. For the 6th FABC Plenary Assembly, that women be invited and a sub-topic on women, as co-creators with God in bringing about and in nurturing life be included, with a message for women.
4. Bring awareness about:
 - Gender sensitivity in our everyday language, songs, prayers, and in the division of roles, tasks and responsibilities in the Church;
 - Priestly formation in terms of gender ideology, and;
 - Seminary teaching staff—to be more open to women professors.

B. For the FABC Offices:

1. That the Office of Laity and Office of Human Development set up a Women's Commission and encourage the national Bishops' Conferences to do the same with the following objectives:
 - Promote encounters and dialogue between women and men in the Church, especially in decision-making;
 - Evoke men—women collective awareness;
 - Study and train on "gender and development";
 - Affirm and facilitate the networking among women groups;
 - Promote awareness through information sharing.
2. That the Office of Social Communication:
 - Develop communication/dialogue/talking and listening at all levels about women's issues;
 - Evaluate/analyze the abuse of women in the mass media and contribute to awareness raising.
3. That the Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy:
 - Promote a re-education of Christian families, discover the new concept of Christian family;
 - Analyze existing teaching materials and text books, and encourage the development of new ones from the gender perspective.
4. That the Office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs:
 - Promote networking with ecumenical and inter-religious groups on women issues;
 - Initiate and encourage the study on how religions affect women in society.
5. That the Theological Advisory Commission:
 - Develop a theology of Compassion for the Asian Churches;
 - Invite women feminist theologians into their commission.

APPENDIX II

Resolutions and Recommendations of BILA on Women II, "Role of Women in Church and Society, Toward 2000," held in Pattaya, Thailand, November, 1995.

A. We resolve:

- 1) To commit ourselves to uphold the dignity of women as equal partners;
- 2) To face the injustices in Church and in society that discriminate against women, the poor, the marginalized and the indigenous peoples;
- 3) To denounce cultural practices that violate the human dignity of women, such as female foeticide and infanticide, genital mutilation, child labour, dowry practice, prostitution, trafficking of women and children and sex tourism;
- 4) To fight, joining with other groups — NGOs and those of other religions — against all forms of violence against women like: domestic violence, sexual harassment and molestation, rape, murders...

B. We recommend:

- 1) That there be, to begin with, at least a 30 percent participation of women in all Church organizations and councils;
- 2) That at the diocesan level, a committee be formed to address injustice especially against women and children; and to take immediate action;
- 3) That in the Church, women, including the religious sisters, be justly compensated for their work;
- 4) That women's theology be introduced in seminaries and formation centers;
- 5) That women be given support and opportunities which will enable them to study theology, like: scholarships, child care facilities for students with children, part-time courses with schedules suitable to women and in convenient locations.

APPENDIX III

Recommendations of BILA on Women II, "Discipleship of Women — A Service to Life," held in Pattaya, Thailand, October, 1998.

We propose that the national Commissions for Laity/Women undertake a periodic survey to encourage action on the recommendations of BILA on Women I and II. The area of Feminist Theology needs special mention, as we see this as vital for changing attitudes, for promoting the inclusion of women in decision-making and full partnership in the mission of the Church.

To encourage the discipleship of women for service to life, we recommend to the local conferences and dioceses:

1. That Church commissions and organizations of women network with women's organizations of other religions and secular organizations involved in grassroots work for the liberation of all oppressed people.
2. That a regional level network be established for the exchange and sharing of news, resources, support and creating solidarity on issues.
3. That sub-regional level meetings alternate with meetings at the Asian level so that concerns in the region can be discussed, and action formulated and implemented.
4. That a communication network be established between countries to share news, for support and solidarity.
5. That women be encouraged to do theology from the perspective of their struggles and experiences of life; that these theological reflections of women be recognized and included in the production of catechetical material, and the curriculum of religious formation in the Church at all levels — the clergy, the laity and the religious.
6. That women theologians be invited to become members of theological commissions at national and FABC levels.
7. That awareness on women's oppression be created among all, especially men so that they are also drawn into the process of change for a new society.
8. That Mariology present an understanding of Mary and images that are inspiring and liberative for women. This calls for the need to review Marian devotions and to contextualize them.

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