



The Circle Newsletter

No. 5. August 2005

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

Violence Against Women

In the present issue of the *Circle Newsletter*, we have chosen to write about violence against women in Africa: the manner in which it operates in social and religious institutions, as well as the assets that we as women of Africa have at our disposal to fight and defeat it. Given that the publications of the *Circle* and of its members are full of permanent denunciations of the violent religious traditions and ancestral customs that seriously inhibit the full humanity of the African woman; we want to clarify here the main issues that these denunciations unveil and to open new perspectives on actions that could be pragmatic, realistic and efficient.

To introduce this reflection on the violence that women often live with in their daily life in Africa, I have chosen to speak of two forms of violence: the violence of the “mad phallus” and the violence of intellectual denigration of women in some institutions of theological formation in Africa. These two forms of violence have been presented in my book in collaboration with the Congolese scholar Kä Mana, which will be published very shortly at the CIPCRES Editions in Cameroon, under the title, *Manifeste de la Femme Africaine: Un nouveau chemin d'humanité* [*Manifest of the African Woman: A New Path of Humanity*]. In this book we speak of seven forms of violence that African women undergo and against which it is time to mobilise ourselves in all our strengths so that the order of things might change thereby enabling our society to experience a deep trans-



Dr Hélène Yinda
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formation in its vision and in practices of relationships between man and woman.

The violence of the “mad Phallus” is a syndrome of mentality that makes the domain of sexuality a field of masculine domination of women possible, a destructive space for the life of many girl children and women who in facing assault have their feminine intimacy constantly profaned by acts of barbaric sexual aggression. You will understand that the term “mad Phallus” does not only designate that uncontrolled and delinquent male genital organ, but it also seeks to identify that mind-set where masculine domination fails to see beyond the sex act and thereby kills the vital creative strengths of the woman and of the girl child while reducing them to

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mere sex objects and into the primary eroticism from which they can never get out.

Contemporary Africa suffers from this pathology. Thousands of women could testify what they endure in this domain. As a result, we realise that it is not only about reductionism towards this kind of imagery, but bespeaks of a social practice resorting to violence, psychological and physical pressures, the power of money and social status, breaches of confidence and the manipulation of conscience.

How do we get out of a system already deeply implanted into the consciousness and collective unconsciousness of African women, as well as within the functioning of social institutions and of the church? In other words, we, as African women should be the first to call for social change that will put an effective end to the violence of the mad and delinquent Phallus, thereby emancipating ourselves from the experience of humiliation, servitude, domination and dehumanisation lived by the multitude of us. This struggle should mobilise the strengths of men and women to change the paradigm of the patriarchal masculinist and phallogocratic system from which we all suffer in Africa, towards a new order of vital relationships between male and female genders.

There is not only this form of violence of the “mad Phallus.” There also exists the intellectual denigration woman, despite the fact that African women also share the same capacity to study at the highest academic level.

What is at stake here is not a simple injustice attributed to the poor functioning of institutions of higher education in Africa, especially those institutions of theological formation. It is about the violent expression of a social system accustomed to function with mechanisms of exclusion towards women. The psychological processes by which these mechanisms spread, aim to weigh heavy on the very being of a

woman, so that she feels obliged to obey the given social order without ever contesting it. The level of intellectual education which could be invoked here to indicate that the woman has reached an ontological degree similar to that of the man is quickly neutralised by the denigration of that knowledge acquired by the female gender. It is this denigration that is registered as violence in our society.

Today, we should urgently mobilise ourselves against that violence which condemns women to ignorance and illiteracy; that denigrates women’s expertise in the highest milieu of knowledge; that forces women to use sex as a means to reach a certain level of social rank, and the “madness of the Phallus” which dishonours and annihilates the dignity of African women. It is time to become fully committed in the struggle against this order of violence. This fight for the cause of African women is not just a fight for the cause of women; it is also a fight for the liberation of the African man.

To know more about what to expect from such a struggle, I refer you to my book where this question is treated in greater detail: *Manifeste de la Femme Africaine* [*Manifest of the African Woman*]. It can be ordered from CIPCRE at the following address:

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By Dr Hélène Yinda

Francophone Research
Coordinator

“NO” to the Abuse of Trust, Power and Violence

Rev Dr Nyambura Njoroge
(The Programme Staff of the Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) in the World Council of Churches)

How may we say “NO” to the abuse of trust and power and violence by the way we teach theological education and ministerial formation in church-owned and sponsored theological institutions, faculties and theological education by extension programmes—which in my view form the bastion of patriarchy, sexism, victimisation and stigmatisation of women? How do we re-learn to treat women in these institutions and churches with dignity and respect despite our human failures and weaknesses? How do we nurture skills that are affirming, uplifting and empowering of all those victimised women because they are single, divorced, child-less and those who bear girl-children only? How do we eradicate the sexual violence of children and women that occurs in these institutions and elsewhere—sometimes spoken in whispers and occasionally reported to the police? Simply asked: how do we stop demeaning and devaluing women, treating them as sex objects and depicting them as being arrogant, rude, proud and stubborn, especially when they acquire what was the preserve of men: higher education? These are some of the questions I have garnered as I have interacted with theological administrators, educators, students and church leaders in various institutions on the African continent. My intention here is not to paint a negative image of these institutions or their programmes or even that of our churches and the continent as a whole, but rather to seek ways of speaking/exposing the truth in love and grace.

Certainly we need to take stock of what has happened since

women moved from the bedrooms, kitchens and corridors of these institutions to the classroom as students, lecturers and administrators. Nevertheless, in this brief summary I wish to acknowledge that even though we have come a long way, the road ahead remains treacherously slippery and steep. There remain many obstacles in the way. For instance, when a principal/dean of an institution categorically states: "I have been a student of some of the leading feminist theologians in the USA, but feminist theology will not be taught in "my" institution because church leaders do not like it," then we know that we are in for the long haul. Or when another says: "But you Circle women demonise the church, how then do you expect us to read your writings?" In some of these institutions there is a strong resistance to change and failure to acknowledge that it is because of God's grace that transformation is taking place in women's lives and that we are taking our rightful place in positions of leadership and other positions traditionally reserved for men ONLY!

Having said all this, I would sincerely like to pay tribute to all the men and women (including our partners from other continents) who have made it possible for us to make this "leap of faith" to follow our ministerial calling and teach at these institutions. By ministry, I mean those varieties of ministry that demand concentrated and sound theological education and ministerial formation, whether towards ordination or not. Obviously, some theological students end up working in a secular setting, although that does not make what they do any less of a ministry. Equally, I wish to extend my gratitude to all those who have made it their business to ensure that what we write as women gets onto the required reading lists for all the classes. And finally, to the many "Josephs" (Joseph, husband of Mary, Mother of Jesus) as Mercy Amba Oduyoye would call them, who in one way or another have been most

supportive and unafraid to obey God's voice, in demanding that we are not victimised and stigmatised because we are found "pregnant out of wedlock." We have a few milestones to celebrate, but there are many PhDs out there: PULL HER DOWN.

So then, how do we deal with abuse of trust, power and the violence that prevails within our homes, churches and society? This is the question that led a few of us to hold the "Tamar Campaign Workshop" and to move it beyond its birth place at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa to the rest of the continent South of the Sahara. The workshop took place 23rd February - 1st March 2005 at Limuru, Kenya. Briefly, the Tamar Campaign, based as it is on the rape narrative of Tamar by half-brother Ammon (2 Samuel 13:1-22), is the brain child of the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, formerly known as the Institute of the Study of the Bible and Worker Ministry Project (ISB-WMP), at the School of Religion and Theology in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. (For more details how the campaign started see *Ministerial Formation*, WCC Publications, July 2004, No. 103: 4-12). The main objective of the workshop was twofold:

- ⇒ To raise critical awareness of violence against children and women and in particular the monstrous crime of sexual violence upon female bodies of all ages and its extreme forms in war-torn situations in Africa;
- ⇒ To introduce the methodology and strategy used in the Tamar Campaign to break the conspiracy of silence and end sexual violence through the use of contextual bible studies that bring together socially engaged biblical scholars, theologians and pastors with readers of the Bible (literate or not), who share their resources

in order to find empowering and liberating ways of living.

The workshop was a result of the collaboration of the Ujamaa Centre and St. Paul's United Theological College, (SPUTC) Limuru, Kenya; the Fellowship of Christian Councils of Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). In total, 45 participants (25 women and 20 men) and facilitators from twenty African countries south of the Sahara attended, among them lay theologians, administrators of theological institutions, pastors and social scientists, drawn from a wide range of WCC member churches as well as Pentecostal churches. The workshop had four major components:

- ⇒ Contextual bible studies on 2 Samuel 13: 1-22; 2 Samuel 11: 1-27 and Mark 5: 21-6:1 and a session on different kinds of violence against children and women, including case studies on rape, incest and child sexual molestation and how all this relates to the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic;
- ⇒ Launching of the Campaign in Africa by planting thirty trees on the grounds of SPUTC, Limuru, and a Dinner at a hotel in Nairobi City for about 200 people from various churches, NGOs and government officials;
- ⇒ Worship in local churches in the Limuru area and Nairobi City with the opportunity to preach and/or speak about the Campaign;
- ⇒ Sessions on the way forward through evaluation of the above activities.

Overall, the participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in such a difficult topic that is often surrounded by deep secrecy and con-

spiracy of silence, denial and ignorance, despite the fact that sexual violence takes place more often in Christian homes, manses, churches and church-related institutions than is ordinarily acknowledged. There was an overwhelming agreement that for contextual bible studies to be effective the proper training of facilitators must take place and resources on methodology must be produced to accompany the training. A good example of how methodology can be misunderstood and misused was experienced at the Launching Dinner where an invited guest presenter appointed himself to preach and had the incorrect biblical narrative on Tamar (Genesis 38:12-30) and used demeaning images of women, which I wish not to repeat here.

As I reflect on what is happening in our homes, churches and society with regards to all kinds of violence and degrading ways of treating women, I have concluded that theological education and ministerial formation have a critical role to play in empowering women, men, youth and children to say NO to the abuse of trust and power. We therefore need well-articulated methodologies of reading and interpreting biblical texts that attest to the courage and wisdom to say NO. Tamar gives us such COURAGE and WISDOM to say NO! Other texts that come to mind are the widow who demanded JUSTICE from a ruthless judge (Luke 18:1-8) and the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) who demanded healing for her daughter. Second, we need a well-structured pastoral theology curriculum that comprehensively deals with the abuse of trust and power that leads to all kinds of violence as well as associated trauma and dehumanisation. Third, we MUST look into the kind of leadership we have in theological institutions, programmes and churches that allow such an unacceptable treatment of the "Children of God" to continue just because they are born women. We need leadership that does not demand to be

worshipped—men or women—and which is willing, like Joseph and Mary to listen to the voice and leading of the Holy Spirit in our dreams and during the busy-ness of our daily lives. By seeking God's wisdom and grace, let us strive to say NO to all that reduces us to objects of ridicule and spite as we labour in God's deserts and vineyards. Let us remember the words of Isaiah 49: 16, that all, female and male, are inscribed upon the palms of God's hands and that our walls are continually before God. This gives me the grace and courage to say NO to abuse of trust, power and violence!

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

"WELCOME AND SIT IN THE CIRCLE: NO, I AM RUNNING AWAY FROM A VIOLENT MAN, WE ARE TALKING ABOUT VIOLENCE."

By Mary Maribie and Esther Mombo

Over the past year, we have laughed and cried together, we have entertained and welcomed sisters from other Circles, we have bid farewell to members who have finished their studies at the college. The highlight of the year was in the middle of a Circle meeting on violence, where a woman running away from a violent man visited us.

The members of the chapter were listening to a paper on violence when Faith came in followed by a woman carrying a two-year-old girl. She looked shocked and afraid but she was invited to sit in the circle, which she declined. She preferred to sit outside the circle. After the presentation, Faith introduced Sarah and said she was running away from her husband who had been violating her. Sarah was running away from her

husband but he caught up with her before she boarded a Matatu (public transport) to her home. She decided to run into the college compound and look for a place to hide. The watchman at the gate had let her in and closed the gate behind her husband. Unfortunately, the first child who was running with the mother was not able to enter and the father grabbed hold of her, keeping her with him. She was able to come into the college compound with the two-year-old and the seven-year-old remained with the father.

I was shocked to hear her recount her story and invited Sarah to join us even though she sat outside the circle so that her daughter could move about. At lunchtime we were served a meal and I sat next to her to hear more of her story.

Sarah had been married to this man for a few years. She had two girl-children by him. It was not easy for her because she earned little money at the flower farm. She used to do some vegetable business and he was violent to her. On this particular day, her husband accused her of losing one hundred shillings (£1.00). He wanted the money back, but she did not have it. He started a fight and because she had lived like this for a long time, she decided to run away. She packed her belongings and left the house. Discovering that she was running away he began chasing her. That is when she ran to the college gate and the watchman learning she was in trouble, opened the gate for her to come in and locked the man out. The man hurled abuse at the watchman and Sarah, but she ran and entered the male hostel and was found by Faith who had brought her into the Circle meeting. Her wish was to get her seven-year-old daughter from the man and then go back to her home.

Following Lunch, we continued with the Circle meeting and Sarah sat-in, hearing what we were saying. Once the meeting had concluded with prayer, we had Sarah and her baby with us and her other

child was with her husband. The leaders of the Circle sat with her and talked further with her. Sarah said she wanted help to get her other daughter from her husband, as she was not sure of her safety. While we were talking, the watchman came and told us the man had reported the matter to the police and wanted his wife to go with him so that they would sort it out with the police. Sarah did not want to go alone because she was unsure what he had told the police. The members of the Circle decided to accompany her to the police station in case they did not listen to her story and offer their assistance. Together with this, Circle members raised some money which she could use for transport after the visit to the police station.

As the Circle members left they talked about violence, which was no longer an idea but a distinct reality! Further, Sarah had gained some confidence having been among other women. At the police station her husband had reported that Sarah had stolen from him six thousand shillings (£60.00). Sarah was to face deep trouble if she could not produce this money. She had told the circle members that it was only one hundred shillings but the husband had reported otherwise. By this time the seven-year-old had joined her mother. Circle members spoke with the police, telling them that Sarah had reported to them that only one hundred shillings had been lost and that it was this which had first started the feud. They also challenged the man, asking him why he was violent towards his wife. After a lengthy discussion Sarah challenged her husband by saying they never had six thousand shillings as the business she ran was so small that she could not earn that amount of money and neither did he bring it home.

The Circle members asked him if the six thousand shillings was in hard cash or it was in some stock. He confessed that there never was six thousand shillings, but that he

was using this to threaten Sarah and to convince the Police to help him get her back. He also confessed that he had been violent towards her but wanted her to return to the house so that they could sort the issues out between them and live together as a family. He was not providing for the family adequately but he would reform. Sarah refused to return, saying that he always used this tactic after he had violated her. The policeman asked Sarah if she could go back to the house with her husband since he had accepted he was in the wrong. Sarah said she would not return since he had not even been to her home to know where she came from and make himself known to her family. She was staying with him hoping he would change but it appeared that this was not going to take place.

Sarah wanted to return to her home and raise her children using the income from the small business that she had while staying with him. The policeman pleaded with her, even asking the Circle members to convince her, but they refused, saying they would not let her go back to such a violent situation. Sarah asked to be escorted to a matatu stop so that she could travel to her home. The policeman released her and the Circle members escorted her, where she boarded a matatu to her home. She is now at her home, working at her small business and raising her children.

The Circle members returned to the college and thanked the watchman who had been kind to Sarah and her baby. The theme of violence has remained strong among members because the visit by Sarah made it a reality. She had enabled some of the Circle members to visit the police station and realise that one does not always win because of the truth, but rather it is the way things are said and done which matters the most. Standing in solidarity with those in violent situations is something that the chapter has taken serious note of. It was due to the fact that they were there taking

part in the discussion and offering their perspectives that Sarah did not remain at the mercy of her husband and the police. The police station, which many women fear, is no longer a fearful place, because dialogue can take place.

Amidst all the violence, we managed to dance it away as we celebrated the end of the year bidding farewell to Caroline Wickens, Mary Muthoni Maribie, Christine Nyambura, Mercy Kimani, Therese Mukamakuza, Nellie Karobia, Tabitha Runji and Elizabeth Orwa.

OVERCOMING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Conference Report by Rose Mary
Amenga-Etego**

From the 5th to 10th April 2005, the International Conference on **Overcoming Violence against Women** was organised by the WCC under the auspices of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) project in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Conference, held in Dunblane consisted of fifteen participants drawn from the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, Pacific, Africa and Europe. Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, a Ghanaian studying at the University of Edinburgh represented the Circle at the Conference. Her panel presentation on "Violence against Women in Contemporary Ghanaian Society" was well received. Esther Mambo from Kenya, another member of the Circle was also in attendance although her participation was not based on her Circle membership.

The main aim of the Conference was to prepare for the WCC Assembly in Brazil in 2006. It also aimed to encourage, inform and resource churches and related bodies with the current state of work in the area of violence against women. The Conference was a call for continuous education, commitment and action despite the difficulties, apathy and

resistance in the fight to end violence against women. The Conference noted the positive responses by some churches, communions and networks in what can be called the “good practices and procedures” but it also stated categorically that, “so much more remains to be done if churches are truly to become sanctuaries of courage for all God’s people”

The Conference was held in two parts. The first part was held in the Scottish Churches House in Dunblane and was devoted to discussions on the current state of affairs on the theme. The issues discussed included the resurgence of fundamentalism, the availability of resources and funding for conservative ideas and their implications on the fight against violence. There was also an urgent call for creative theological thinking and innovations along side critical methodological questions and strategies to continuously engage and challenge new discourses arising from existing strategies. At the same time, the continuous call for creative hermeneutical reflections on the Christian concepts of passion and salvation was emphasised. The call brought immediate responses from members in the form of the ‘body, tree and hen’ theological concepts as possible starting points for a reconstructive theology on violence as opposed to the ‘passion and lamb of God’ theological constructs. The urgent call to digress from the norm to meet the challenging needs of today was emphatically called for.

Despite the many challenging ideas at the Conference, members bemoaned the slow state of change. The current state of backlash on the fight to end violence against women as well as those on the rights of women was also discussed. Of particular concern was the rise of conservative masculine and feminine groups. The need to collaborate, network and address the issue of masculinity was therefore greatly discussed. The discussion was particularly enriched by the presence of Dr.

Merle Longwood from the USA.

The main question ‘what is there to be done again when so much has already been done to no avail’ was critically reflected upon in various dimensions. Reflections on the concepts and understanding of fear, power and loss, adjustments and time with regards to the process of change were made. The workshop session ended with a resolved solidarity call and encouragement to members. It also called on all parties in the struggle to continue to fight on despite the current difficulties.

The second part of the Conference was an open day event which brought the Conference to a close. It was a day in which individual papers by some of the participants were presented to the public for discussion. It was held at the Centre for Advance Studies in Christian Ministry at the University of Glasgow on Saturday 9th April. The theme was **Overcoming Violence Against Women: A Theological Imperative?** The highlight of the day was the morning session when the two key speakers, Dr. Aruna Gnanadason of the WCC and Rev. Dr. Sirirat Pudurinkham challenged the gathering with their presentations on ‘We have spoken so long, O God: When will we be heard?’ and the ‘Trafficking of Women and Children in Thailand’ respectively. The afternoon session was devoted to panel presentations and discussions. In all, ten presentations were made at the public Conference at the University of Glasgow.

NEWS FROM THE GENERAL COORDINATOR’S OFFICE

By Professor Isabel Apawo Phiri

I am pleased to announce that I am back from sabbatical leave at Yale University where I spent the first six months of 2005. The first three months consisted of adjusting to the American educational system and

extreme cold weather. This was punctuated with a busy programme at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS, the Yale Divinity School and the School of Public Health and Epidemiology, attending classes, writing research proposals and giving class presentations. It was a totally new experience to be a student again, when for the past twenty-two years I have been on the teaching staff. I also made a number of visits to HIV/AIDS community programmes, church speaking engagements; AIDS Science Day; New York International HIV Research Consortium, Yale International AIDS Summer Institute on ethical research challenges, and presentations to possible Circle donors.

During this time I also managed to co-edit with Sarojini Nadar two issues of the Journal of Constructive Theology and one book in honour of Mercy Oduyoye. I worked with Dorcas Ankitunde, Sarojini Nadar, Fulata Moyo and Lilan Siwila through e mail, text messages and phone conversations to organise the Circle Regional Conference. By the time the six months were over, I was exhausted and needed a vacation!

The positive side of this experience was having space to work very hard in a quiet environment where I could have access to the internet 24 hours a day. This helped me to get up to date with current research on HIV/AIDS. I also



Professor Isabel Apawo Phiri

appreciated making contacts with lots of people. I particularly appreciated the time I spent with Letty Russell, Shannon Clark and Margaret Farley. It gave me an opportunity to become close to them, getting to know them better and learn from their vast experience.

Constance Shisanya, a Circle member from Kenya and Sr. Therese Tinkansimire, a Circle member from Uganda provided another good experience. I learnt something positive from each of them. We each had excellent apartments at the Overseas Ministries Study Centre. We had an opportunity to meet missionaries from all over the world and share with them the work of the Circle. I will share in detail about our research projects in the next newsletter. For now, I would like to encourage as many Circle members as possible to plan to go on regular sabbatical holidays. We need to take care of ourselves by taking regular breaks from our routine jobs. Then we won't have to jam pack our sabbatical holidays. I have learnt my lesson very well and I plan to go on another sabbatical leave in 2008.

Two weeks after returning home I attended a workshop in Botswana organised by Musa Dube, where each participant presented a module of ten units for Theological Education by Extension where we were mainstreaming HIV/AIDS. In the team of ten writers, four were members of the Circle, something to be happy about as our theology is influencing the thinking of theological students all over the continent. Musa Dube is doing a tremendous job.

From Botswana I went directly to the Kempton Park Conference Centre in Johannesburg for the Circle Anglophone Regional Conference. This is the Conference which we had previously advertised was going to be held in Malawi. Due to limited financial resources we had to change the venue and reduce the number of participants. We have failed to organise similar conferences

for Lusophone and Francophone for other reasons. You will get a detailed report of this Conference in our next newsletter. Suffice it to say here that we had a wonderful time celebrating Auntie Mercy Oduyoye as the founder of the Circle. We presented papers and had workshops to assist each other prepare papers for publication. We are expecting two publications from this Conference. We received Circle regional and chapter reports. We also had a chance to have a Circle Executive meeting where we planned for the 2007 Circle Pan African conference and initiate the process of discussing the draft Circle constitution. Again more information will come in the next newsletter.

Remain blessed as you continue to work for gender justice in your communities. Your sister in the Circle.

News from the Lusophone Research Coordinator

By Reverend Felicidade Cherinda

We, as women pastors in Mozambique and Angola face innumerable challenges, notably that of theological formation and writing. For the most part we have insufficient knowledge to write. However, some of us could write if we could receive an adequate formation and follow-up. Other short length formations are also important in situations such as ours. It is also important to note that the majority among us in Mozambique, for example, have spent three months

or more without receiving a salary as workers of the Church.

In spite of all this, we have invested ourselves in other activities that help women be visible and useful in the Church and society. They are mainly concrete projects linked to life and to the devastation caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. When one looks at our society, women have only a rudimentary knowledge of HIV/AIDS. Although some men have access to information, they have difficulty in speaking openly about AIDS. We are therefore waiting impatiently for the appointment of a Portuguese-speaking theological consultant for the Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiatives in Africa (EHAIA). We are of the opinion that this person will undoubtedly be of great help to Portuguese-speaking members of the Circle in their commitment in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

News from the Francophone Research Coordinator

By Dr Hélène Yinda

Since the call for the book in honour of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, we have received some articles. Members of the Circle who would still like to contribute can do so until December



Hélène Yinda at the meeting of the leaders of the Angolan Circle in Luanda with Eva Cosme, Deolinda, Josephina and Elisa

1st, 2005. The theme of the book is: *Women Religion and Health in Africa*. The sub-themes are:

- ⇒ Theoretical frameworks and methodologies for the Circle;
- ⇒ African women, the Bible and health;
- ⇒ Women as Traditional Healers in Africa;
- ⇒ African women, Islam and health;
- ⇒ Theological Reflections on Children and Women's Rights in Africa;
- ⇒ Theological Reflection of African women's experiences of Family, Ethnicity, and Sexual health.

Our important action for 2005 is to test the modules that we developed in the 2004 Workshop in Yaoundé on *Engendering the Theological Curriculum in Africa*. The document was sent to some individual professors of theology and also circulated in some French-speaking Protestant Catholic and Evangelical theological institutions. As of now, we have received positive comments, constructive and very encouraging critiques. We have also recorded untamed resistance from some faculties of theology, where the curriculum has been labelled "Off limits" (*Non entrée en Matière*, NEM). We wish indeed that this curriculum becomes an effective instrument of education and formation within our theological institutions for the transformation of our society and of our faith communities.

Before the publication in 2006 of this handbook on *Engendering the Theological Curriculum in Africa*, we are dreaming of visiting most of the French-speaking Faculties of theology so that we can seize the opportunity to establish relationships of dialogue with the leadership of the theological institutions and with Churches so that they might understand that rather than the Circle be-

ing a problem, it is seen as a solution for the Church in Africa. Thus, the French-speaking Coordinator will be ready for the Pan-African Conference of the Circle of 2007! Shalom!

News from the Circle Chapters: Madagascar

By Colette Ranarivony

The Circle Chapter in Madagascar was founded in August 2003 shortly after the meeting in Porto-Novo, Benin of female French-speaking theologians. At the same time, an oral and written report of the Port Porto-Novo seminar was sent to Church leaders (Lutheran and Reformed, which had representatives in Porto-Novo). To facilitate the creation of the Circle, it was done at the level of the association of "Woman CETA" of Madagascar, which was established some years ago. Numbers of women can be reached through CETA (*Conférence des Eglises de Toute l'Afrique*/Conference of the Churches of All Africa) as well as women who are not necessarily theologians by formation. During our first historic Circle meeting, its objectives, quality and commitment of members were made known. To achieve the further dissemination of the report to women and to other churches the following means were used:

- ⇒ A radio broadcast (Radio Station of the Presbyterian Church) based on an interview of two participants at the seminar of Porto-Novo;
- ⇒ Articles written in Women's magazines as well as those magazines of the various Churches;
- ⇒ A call to women was also made by personal contact.

It is necessary to note that the Circle is known throughout Madagascar.

However, because a national level meeting has not been possible until now, communications and information between the members of the Circle of Madagascar is disseminated through articles, letters and e-mails, as well as by telephone and personal contact.

In addition to this, members of the Circle benefit from the meetings of women in their respective Churches to speak of the Circle and to mobilise women. Every Church benefits by these meetings of female theologians, be they local, regional or national. As a result, women and female theologians have been informed on everything that was achieved during the two meetings of French-speaking female theologians held August 11th-22nd, 2003 held in Porto-Novo, Benin and those in Yaoundé, Cameroon August 13th-21st, 2004. The call for articles in honour of Mercy Amba Odudoye has also been communicated to women in this manner.

Problems of the Circle are not to be disregarded in Madagascar. There is, for example, the problem of time to write. Many women are interested, but when it comes to commit oneself to write it is another matter. To write is not easy for women, but they do make an effort. Some have already written articles.

Female theologians of the Lutheran Church have already formed their association but they are interested in integrating themselves within the Circle. The French language however is an obstacle to such integration. The Circle as a space for women to express and enrich themselves and thereby to blossom has been encouraging. Some have as a result written, while others have showed a willingness to translate their writings. The concrete situation now is that many have written, but in Malagasy.

In spite of all this, even though it will take time, the Circle of women theologians in Madagascar will hold an important place in the Church and society. The Circle in

Madagascar works in partnership with male theologians and pastors. Chapter Members of the Circle of Madagascar, through their reflections and their writings, will surely make their contributions towards changing Malagasy society, as well as African society as a whole: a just society where all will enjoy the same rights as God intended.

**Catholic Chapter
Kinshasa, Democratic
Republic of Congo**

By Sister Josée Ngalula

News, which perhaps will be good for the Circle is that of a young priest who having finished his studies in theology in Nairobi and having been attracted to feminism, recently came to ask what he could do for the cause of women. When he further asked that I teach him to write, I suggested that we write an anthology together of all the biblical texts that relate to women.

As a result of this collaboration, we are rereading the whole Bible, sentence by sentence, taking note of all women, as well as the manner in which they are spoken of, themes which are linked to them, etc., etc. We are nearly up to 200 women. Normally, it would be a working manual for any research on the woman in the Bible: all biblical references will be appended, all names of women mentioned, a chapter on African women about whom the Bible speaks, a further chapter on violence against woman, another on woman's faith, woman involved in politics, etc. The title will be: *You Are God Who Sees Me [Tu es Dieu qui me voit]*. It is the very first title given to God in the Hebrew Testament and it is by a woman, Hagar, the Egyptian and maidservant of Sara, exploited sexually by her mistress, etc. We will see what it will produce. In the meantime, we have already experienced opposition, there being those, who having been so irritated

by our efforts, have promised to do their very best to make sure book will never be published! Watch this space for further news on this important project...

**Discovering Christian
Theologies of the World:
Palestinian Christian
Theology of Liberation:
Sabeel**

Adapted from the Website of
Sabeel: www.sabeel.org

Sabeel is an ecumenical movement working for the liberation of Palestinian Christians. It operates as an ecumenical centre for a Palestinian theology of liberation which aims to make the Christian Gospel relevant in the current Palestinian context. In Arabic, *Sabeel* means "the way, the source of water." *Sabeel* endeavours to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation and reconciliation of different faith communities. *Sabeel* also works for a sharper international conscience concerning the identity, presence and testimony of Palestinian Christians. For more information on the *Sabeel's* Conference in Jerusalem, visit their Website: www.sabeel.org

Letter of the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (EAAT)

We are very happy to announce the revivification of the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (EAAT). After a long period of hibernation due to the murder of Father Engelbert Mveng, the EAAT resumes its programmes of publication and theological animation in the service of faith communities. We are happy to be able to rely on the dynamism of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in order to assure everywhere in the world

the radiance of African theology. God bless us all! For more information about the EAAT, contact cipcre.dg@cipcre.org

**Call for Contributions:
Religion and Violence**

**By Rosemary Radford Ruether and
Lisa Isherwood**

Rosemary Radford Ruether and Lisa Isherwood have established an important collection at Equinox Publishers which will highlight the problem of religion and violence. The emphasis of this collection is the considerable role that religions play in the creation of cultures that permit and even encourage armed conflicts, conjugal abuses, as well as policies and attitudes of States that maintain violence among their citizens.

The directors of the publication have at heart a collection which brings to light those problems with which women are specifically confronted during situations of armed conflict and restraining civic policies. One hopes therefore that there will be those who would like to write essays which ponder upon these different aspects.

Anxious that authors might not only identify problems, the directors of this collection want authors to revisit traditions in search of alternative and more encouraging readings of doctrines and traditions. One of the objectives of the collection is to provide a strident voice against rampant fundamentalism and its corrosive effects on the life of women and children.

This collection should be interdisciplinary and multicultural. Suggestions from specialists from various disciplines are warmly welcomed. Rosemary Radford and Lisa Underwood are also considering a collection which critically explores topics ranging from conjugal violence to the violence of unbridled capitalism.

If you would like to submit a proposal, please send it by email to Lisa Isherwood at:

Lisa@grayish.demon.co.uk

International Conferences on HIV/AIDS

The Conference *VIVRE 2005* [To Live 2005] initially planned for October 9-13, 2005 in Lima, Peru will now be held March 12-16, 2006. For more information visit the Web site: www.vivir2005.org

The XIV International Conference on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases in Africa (ICASA 2005) will be held December 4-9, 2005 in Abuja, Nigeria. For more information visit the Web site: www.icasa2005.com.

The XVI International Conference on HIV/AIDS will be held in August 2006 in Toronto, Canada. For your information, the pdf version of the report of the XV International Conference on HIV/AIDS of 2004 in Bangkok, Thailand is available at the following Web site: <http://www.iasociety.org/pdf/BangkokReport.pdf>

Celebration of Members of the Circle

Dr Anastasie MASANGA Maconda (Democratic Republic of Congo)

In July 2004, the Congolese theologian, Anastasie Masanga Maconda of the Evangelical Community of the Covenant of the Democratic Republic of Congo successfully obtained her doctorate in theology at the Protestant University of Congo in Kinshasa. The title of her thesis



was: *Theology of Sexes' Difference: Conflictual Communication in the Yombe Culture of the Congo*. Dr Maconda is now teaching systematic theology in the Faculty of Evangelical Theology of Boma.

Dr Priscille DJOMHOUE (Cameroon)

In February 2005, Priscille Djomhoue successfully obtained her



doctorate at the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Yaoundé, Cameroon. The title of her thesis was: *Foreigner in the House of God? Narrative Study of Acts 10-11, 18 and Attempt to Actualisation*. Dr Priscille Djomhoue is the first female to become a lecturer in New Testament at the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Yaoundé.

Background to the Circle

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter, the Circle) was inaugurated in 1989. In the year 2004, the Circle had a registered membership of over 600 members on the African continent and abroad. The criterion for membership is a commitment to research, writing and publishing on issues affecting African women and women of African descent.

The Circle is the space for women from Africa to do communal theology based on their religious, cultural and social experiences. It draws its membership from women of diverse backgrounds, nationalities, cultures and religions rooted in African Indigenous Religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It encompasses indigenous African women and seeks to relate to African women of American, Asiatic, and European origins. These concerned women are engaged in theological dialogue with cultures, religions, sacred writings and oral stories that shape the African context and define the women of this continent.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Circle is to undertake research, writing and publishing on African issues from a women's perspective.

Vision

The vision of the Circle is to empower African women to contribute their critical thinking and analysis to advance current knowledge. Theology, religion and culture are the three chosen foci, which must be used as the framework for Circle research and publications.

The Pan-African Conference of the Circle clearly showed that this movement has grown and expanded and put its roots deep in the hearts of many women in Africa. It was amazing to realise that since 1989, members of the Circle have written and published 36 books. The authors attribute their publications to motivation stemming from participation in the Circle. This implies that the Circle is fulfilling its mission: To undertake research and publish theological literature written by African women with special focus on religion and culture.

Please share with us news from your Chapter of the Circle!!!

Contact details for The Circle Newsletter:

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