
ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

Summer 1993

NEWSLETTER

Volume 9 Number 2



From the Director,
Margaret Wiborg

Justice-Making, Bread-Breaking

Excerpts from Kwok Pui-lan's address

This newsletter focuses on the March 1993 Women and the Word and its events. However, it is difficult to convey through verbal imagery the visual and emotional impact of Kim Yong Im's powerful artwork that filled the walls of the ballroom, or to recapture the power of liturgical dance as interpreted by African-American, Korean, and Anglo dancers, or other of the more experiential components of the conference. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite's presentation stemmed from her "immersion experience" in the Third World as mentioned in Kwok Pui-lan's address. Susan spoke from the research she and Rita Nakashima Brock are doing on prostitution in Asia and its implications for feminist theology. Their work will be available in book form, hopefully in the not-too-distant future. Kwok Pui-lan's words enabled the many Western participants at the conference to look at the world from a different perspective. A condensed version of her address forms the main body of this newsletter.—For those interested in copies of the Women and the Word 1993 audio tapes, they are available from the Shaw Center for \$15 for the set.

✱

Special Note: The Anna Howard Shaw Center now has a bright new look, thanks to the efforts of Doreen Treacy ('92), Barb Livingston ('90), Julie Marshlian ('94), Sonya Marshlian, and Margaret Wiborg, the members of the committee. Through their planning, the Center now has new carpeting and window blinds, newly-painted walls and bookshelves, new curtains, and reupholstered couches, all illuminated by new light fixtures. For those who miss the old burnt-orange couch coverings and "ice cube tray" overhead lights; well, you'll always have your memories.

✱

Professor Kwok Pui-lan began by inviting the participants to assume the position of the bowed woman (see page 4) which was the illustration for the worship bulletin and the banner which hung in the conference space. Getting on our knees while offering life to the world helped us to see how Third World women perceive their world. She concluded her reflection by inviting the audience to join her in singing "Green Pine Trees," a Korean song which celebrates the beauty and tenacity of the green pine tree which survives harsh weather and neglect to remain living and strong.

In the 1980s, the Association of Theological Schools began to emphasize globalization in theological education. Many theological educators participated in the so-called "immersion" experience in the Third World. When I was in Hong Kong, I met many groups coming from Chicago, Claremont, and Berkeley. We shared with them the life and struggle of the Asian people. They left and we did not know what they would do when they returned to the USA. We had no idea whether they would do something to change theological education in the light of what they had learned about the peoples of the Third World.

Hong Kong is one of the few places in Asia still under the colonial rule of a Western power. In the nineteenth century, the British wanted to continue the ludicrous trade of selling opium to the Chinese people. When the Chinese resisted, the British sent in warships and cannons. When the Chinese were defeated, they were forced to sign an unequal treaty in 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing, which ceded Hong Kong to the British. All these unequal treaties, whether signed between the Chinese and the British, the Vietnamese and the French, the Indonesians and the Dutch, the Maori and the pakeha, are protected by international law. The angry Asian and indigenous peoples have reasons to ask "whose order, whose law?" If you think the colonization of the peoples of

Asia were isolated incidents, you are wrong.

This year marks the 501st year of Indian, Black, and popular resistance in the Americas. As we have gathered to discuss the theological implications of a "new world order," we should never forget "a new world order" was first created during the last two decades of the fifteenth century: the Portuguese went around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa into the Indian Ocean in 1485; Columbus in search for a Western passage to the "Indias" arrived in America in 1492; and Vasco da Gama touched Mombasa in Kenya in his journey to India in 1498. The peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas were drawn into the new European world order. The result was centuries of bloody warfare, colonization, rape, and genocide. If you think history will never repeat itself and such a horrible "new world order" would never exist in the future, you might be wrong again.

For who would believe the four white officers who beat Rodney King would be acquitted, especially in the election year? In 1492, who would believe the vast population of Africa, Asia, and the Americas would soon be colonized by the tiny European continent? In 1992, who among the marginalized people in the Third World would believe today's new world order would work for their benefit and welfare? Looking at our world history from the underside, people in the Third World often see things that the rich, the powerful, and men cannot see.

Women who suffer under multiple oppressions develop a kind of multiple consciousness that helps them to name reality in a radical new way. We call this the "epistemological privilege" of the poor. Because these people are at the bottom of the well, they can see the power dynamics in the society much clearer than others. What does the world look like from that vantage point?

We see a world torn between different political ideologies, racial conflicts, and gender inequalities. We see a world ruled by force but clothed and disguised in the name of law and order. We live in a society that equates being black as being dangerous. We live in a country where a black woman has to bring her sexual harassment case before the Senate Judiciary Committee that is made up of all white men. We live in a "civilized" world in which children die by the thousands every day because of malnutrition, while elsewhere food is wasted and milk and grain are destroyed. We live in a "healthy" human community in which people in one place worry

about whether they have basic medical supplies, while people in the U.S. worry about the safety of artificial breast implants. We live in a "sane" environment where people spend lots of money buying books to relieve stress, to help them go to bed, and to achieve self-healing and inner peace. What is more frightening is that what is craziness is seen as normalcy, what is maldevelopment is seen as development, what is chaos is seen as the order of the day. And in the name of the "new world order," the poorer peoples and nations might be ordered or forced to accept it as the future of their own destiny.

Last year I had the opportunity to attend the Assembly of Third World Theologians which was held in Nairobi. This issue of the "collapse" of socialism was discussed at length. To some, the recent events signaled major flaws in the system: the non-democratic form of government, the imposition of a centralized economy, the disregard of people's ethnic and cultural identity, and the lack of freedom for spiritual development of the people. But others cautioned that the failure of the historical models did not negate the basic values, goals, and utopias of socialism. Some Third World theologians commended the historical achievements of several socialist countries in the Third World in terms of how they solve the issues of hunger, education, and basic health care.

Third World theologians at Nairobi might have different positions on socialism and the use of socialist ideology in theological formulation. But we all agree that it will be even more dangerous for people in the Third World if there is only one ideology: free market and capitalism. History tells us we did not fare very well if we were sucked into the global market. We sold timber, coffee, sugar, and other natural resources. We sold away our fresh air when the TNC's [Transnational National Corporations] opened factories in our neighborhood, and we provided the cheap labor to keep these factories running. When the military or the rich businessmen from Japan, Europe, and America need a place for "rest and recreation," we sell our women to satisfy their sexual appetites. My students at Union Theological Seminary are making a quilt for people they know who died of AIDS. But who can make a quilt that is large enough to remember those prostitutes who either died or will die of AIDS in Southeast Asia? According to a United Nations report released last year, about 60 percent of the prostitutes in Thailand, or 250,000 people are HIV positive. In response to the cry of our people, theologians in the

Third World urge the global theological community to search for an alternative model or order.

As a first step in our common search for new alternatives, they affirm some fundamental principles: 1) the fullest participation of all persons at all levels of decisionmaking; 2) economic arrangements that meet the basic needs of all and maintain a sustainable growth; 3) opportunities for education, recreation and leisure, and a healthy environment; 4) space for ethnic and cultural identity and spiritual development; and 5) an international relationship of mutuality and solidarity.

We people in the Third World see the quest for an alternative model as intricately related to addressing the contemporary ecological crisis. The eco-crisis arises as a result of the breaking down of interconnectedness of human beings with one another and with nature. Acid rain, deforestation, the erosion of the ozone layer, the indiscriminate use of fertilizer and pesticide affect devastatingly the weakest sector of the human community: Third World women and their children. **Third World women do not benefit from development models based on industrial and technological growth. In fact, they have paid a heavy human price for "national development" or "economic miracles." Women's productive and sexual labor are exploited and women's lives become more subject to technological surveillance, and state and corporate control.**

Third World women are also blamed as scapegoats for causing the population explosion, leading to the disequilibrium between human beings and natural resources. Pharmaceutical formulas and new contraceptive devices are tested on Third World women and massive sterilization has been forced on them. Technological advances such as the ultrasound test has led to the unintended effect of selective abortion of female fetuses. **Recent demographic studies reveal the stark data that 100 million women are missing in the world, and 60 percent of them in Asia.**

Modern ecological awareness emphasizes the diversity of the species and the worth and dignity of each organism. The principle of diversity and plurality must be equally applied to human beings. We, Christians from Asia, have persistently urged the world-wide Christian community to pay attention to the fundamental differences of divergent religious systems and to respect the rights of other people to find their own meaning of life.

In our Asian context, it is religious arrogance and political naivete to say that "outside church, no salvation," because Asia is the birthplace of most historical religions of humankind. The "Just War" and "Holy War" slogans used during the Gulf War demonstrated how dangerous a narrow and parochial religious world view is.

While we must continue to seek dialogue with people of other faiths, it is imperative that the Christian community should become more open and tolerant of different ideas and ways of belief. It was a young Asian woman theologian who put the issues of religious pluralism and syncretism on the theological agenda of the world-wide Christian community. I suspect these issues will remain with us for a long time. We should be reminded that Christians all through the centuries have sought to relate the Gospel to the cultural context they found themselves in. It should not be surprising that Asian Christian women are doing exactly the same.

Our differences call for open discussion, dialogue, and mutual enrichment. We should never forget how the Christian church has tried to silence dissenting voices through witch burning, excommunication, and other means. While we should continue to live according to the demands of our faith, we must allow room for others to explore their faith, and to live their lives. They are our fellow pilgrims seeking to know the mystery of God.

The challenge for the churches in the nineties is to broaden our vision and deepen our commitment to work for the integrity of creation, justice, and peace. When the ecumenical movement first began, the vision was to promote church unity to carry out the church's witness and mission. In the 1970's, people of other faiths were included through religious dialogue as a step toward building a wider human community. In our present age, the ecumenical movement must move from an ecclesial solidarity to an ecological solidarity.

"Solidarity" in Chinese means gathering together into one and connecting to each other. In the Korean language, the term connotes binding one another into a circle. Its usage in Oriental languages awakens the ecological awareness of the interconnectedness of all things.

Ecological solidarity is intricately related to the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with

Women (1988-1998). The World Council of Churches has urged the churches to pay attention to women's full participation in church and community life, to struggle against racism, sexism, and classism, and to give visibilities to women's perspectives and actions in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. For many decades women of the Third World have been active participants in the struggles for justice, for human rights, for freedom, and for the integrity of creation. In the First World, women are among the most vocal leaders and visionaries of the peace movements and the Green movement.

Ecological solidarity is assuming mutual responsibility instead of finding scapegoats and creating new victims. Indigenous peoples have been saying for centuries that the taking of their land robbed them not only the means of existence, but the meaning of life. Our world would not be safer if the testing of nuclear explosives, the dumping of radioactive wastes, and the storing of nuclear weapons are done far away from Europe and America in the Pacific. Our cities would not be less dangerous if the toxic wastes are only dumped in the Osage Nation in Oklahoma or in Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. Our lives would not be enriched if we ask the next generation to pay for our debts and to be responsible for the mess we have created. We are part of each other, and the breaking down of one ecosystem affects all others.

Ecological solidarity is our covenant to the land, the ocean, the forest, the rivers, and the mountains. Without the hills, where else can we lift up our eyes to ask for help (Ps. 121:1)? Without the trees of the field, who will clap their hands when we go out in joy and be led back in peace (Isa. 55:12)? If we poison the Red Sea, even God might not be able to perform mighty miracles. Our covenant with nature is not based on fear and anxiety because nature is seriously polluted and its resources are limited. We need to renew our covenant with planet earth out of joy, celebration, and gratitude because we are part of nature and the natural process.



Finding Our Strength for the Journey

by Weatherly Burkhead

"Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you" (1 Kings 19:7). This translation of the angel's statement to Elijah interests me, and adds another facet to the translation used as the theme of the conference, "Rise and eat, for the journey is long." Both these statements have meaning for me as a newly ordained clergy person; I need to remember that if I am not "nourished," I will not last through the years of my ministerial "journey" and my life responsibilities will be overwhelming. I am not alone in this realization. Much of the last day of Women and the Word focused on how we are "fed" for the lives we are called to live.

The women and men gathered on the last day of Women and the Word did not focus on bodily hunger. Most of us have the privilege of eating when we choose to, and the blessing of having those resources available. We chose instead to speak of the "empty places" which occur in our lives as we seek to serve God, and to live whole lives.

"How are you 'nourished' or renewed?" was the underlying question, answered in turn by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, Kwok Pui-lan, and Susan Davies, then opened for the community's wisdom. Susan Thistlethwaite spoke in the context of her work with abused women, telling of her experiences and growth through that work and explaining that she drew strength from 1) claiming her anger, 2) healing from the "neck down," (not only intellectually, but physically and emotionally) and 3) "partying hearty," enjoying God-given moments of rest and re-creation.

Kwok Pui-lan spoke of her experiences as a "tomboy" growing up as the third child in a family of seven in which the youngest two children were boys. She told of feeling that she was a disappointment to her mother and father because she was a girl, and extended her personal sense of loss and pain to the general idea that feminist theology, based in painful experiences such as these, "is not written with a pen, but is inscribed on the hearts of many who feel pain yet dare to hope."

The most powerful moments of the plenary happened as Susan Davies spoke about the need to find one's support structure and called upon the community to offer the ways in which they found strength for their life journeys. Beautiful story-telling followed. One woman had decided for her own best interests to

minister forty hours per week in a church community for a salary commensurate with her gifts while making her home in a different community. Others spoke about forming clergywomen's groups which met to study, pray, and play together. The community shared the necessity of having friends and trusted people in our lives whom we can talk to at all times and places.

I was strengthened by a woman's recounting of a terrible ministry experience at a Catholic school. She told of the courage it took for her, a relative newcomer in professional ministry, to leave this job and to talk to two male supervisors about the difficulties she (and her predecessors in the position) had experienced in working with her immediate supervisor. She also shared with us the good news that her former supervisor recently had been asked to leave the school.

Many years ago I learned a game at a Girl Scout camp in which many people formed a circle, each person looking at the back of the person in front of him or her. Then we were all told to "sit down" and as we bent our knees, our bottoms came to rest on the knees of the person behind us while our own knees provided support for the person in front of us. The plenary was an example of how this "game" is lived in our lives. In our "circle" of ministry, we are able to provide support and "nourishment" for one another, so that each one has a place to rest, and is able to provide a resting place for someone else. With God's help, we are able to be "bread" and rest for one another.

*

Additional Note: We would like to include an article in an upcoming issue about how we form our support structures. If you are interested in contributing to the article, please consider the following questions: Have you led or taken part in a group which felt enabling? What was the format? Did you study anything? What made your group work? **All responses will be held in confidence and edited to maintain the contributors' anonymity.** Please send all responses in care of the AHS newsletter. Thank you.

Upcoming Events:

September 24-25, 1993: All Women's Retreat for School of Theology Community. "Sharing Stories That Sustain Us." To be held at the Harrington YMCA camp in Worcester. Details to follow.

September 30, 1993: Dr. Rosemary R. Ruether will be speaking on the topic "Feminist Metanoia and Soul-Making." Sponsored by Boston College Forum on Women, Religion, and Spirituality. 7:30 p.m. at Boston College, location to be announced.

October 24-26, 1993: Dr. Letty Russell will be the speaker for the 1993 Beck Lectureship. Topic: "The Future of the Bible as Teacher." Identical evening lectures will be given in Newton (10/24), Worcester (10/25), and Northampton (10/26). Luncheons for clergy will also be held on Monday, 10/25 in Framingham and Tuesday, 10/26 in Springfield on the theme The Future of Feminist Hermeneutics. More details and directions will be available at a later date.

November 4-7, 1993 in Minneapolis, MN: RE-Imagining, A Theological Conference by Women - The Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women. Theologians, writers, preachers, artists, and educators will include: Rita Nakashima Brock, Kwok Pui-lan, Elizabeth Bettenhausen, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, and Ofelia Ortega. Cost: \$125 (not including housing, but including some meals). For more information, contact: Rev. Sally Hill, TCMCC, 122 W. Franklin, Room 100, Minneapolis, MN 55404.

March 17-18, 1993: Women and the Word, 1994: "The Good News According to Women: Shaking the Foundations, Reclaiming the Hope." Leadership includes: Bishop Leontine Kelly, Rev. Dr. June C. Goudey, and Miriam Therese Winter.

Apologies: Our apologies to Gary and Judith Wagner, who contributed to the Anna Howard Shaw Center Annual Giving Fund in 1992. Their names were not correctly included in the list published in the last AHSC newsletter. Thank you for your generosity.

Welcome Julie!

Julie Marashlian will be the 1993-94 intern in the Anna Howard Shaw Center. Julie is an M.Div. student, an American Baptist, and a member of the committee which organized "Anna's " refurbishing. We wish Julie the best of luck as she begins her ministry in the Shaw Center.

Thanks! Thank you to Weatherly Burkhead for her work as temporary editor of the AHSC newsletter. Weatherly will close her illustrious, one -issue career with this issue, wishing Julie Marashlian much joy and success with her work as editor.

ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

NEWSLETTER
Volume 9, Number 2

Managing Editor
Margaret Wiborg

Editor
Weatherly Burkhead

Contributors
Professor Kwok Pui-lan, Margaret Wiborg, Weatherly Burkhead

Boston University
School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Boston University



Boston University's policies provide for equal opportunity and affirmative action in employment and admission to all programs of the University.

Editor's Note: Certain sections of the lead article by Professor Kwok Pui-lan have been printed in bold type to give emphasis to special points in the address and to make them more prominent visually.