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When Christ becomes Christa

The importance of a contextualization of the cross-event

As a key symbol of the Christian faith, the cross symbolizes God's participation in human suffering and death. An empty cross signifies, on the other hand, the resurrection, or the important message about the final victory of life, over suffering and death. When the cross is interpreted particularly in light of women's experience, it signifies God's compassion with women, who suffer, amongst other things, because of domestic and/or sexual violence. Sometimes this compassion (or co-suffering) is portrayed in a female body on the cross. Christa on the cross is an example of a theological experiment, with the focus on the role and meaning of the cross from the perspective of women's experience.

Glæra 2.

In the past the cross has sometimes been used to discourage people from resisting injustice. Instead they have been encouraged to show tolerance, and in that sense follow Christ's example. Against such ab-use, the cross has been lifted up as an important symbol of the *kenosis* of patriarchy, calling for a radical re-interpretation of our understanding of power and humanity, maleness and femaleness. When the cross is understood as a symbol of *kenosis* of patriarchy, the self-emptying of male dominating power, the power of the cross becomes the power of love instead of the power of control. Therefore, God who we meet on the cross, is not strong or powerful according to the standards of patriarchy, and neither does Jesus' maleness fit the stereotypical understanding of masculinity. Female Christ on the cross helps interpreting the reversal of our expectations revealed on the cross, where the weak

conquers the strong, evil is transformed into something good, and life defeats the power of death.¹

Towards the end of the 20th century, the late Catherine LaCugna made the following remark about the critical role of Christology:

The life of Jesus Christ is at odds with the sexist theology of complementarity, the racist theology of white superiority, the clerical theology of cultic privilege, the political theology of exploitation and economic injustice, and the patriarchal theology of male dominance and control.ⁱ

Regardless of a strong emphasis on the social significance of the life and work of Jesus Christ in the second half of the twentieth century, christological arguments continue to be used by those in power to secure their own territory. One example is how Jesus' maleness has been made into a universal principle, which has been and still is used to question women's ability to represent Christ, and correlatively to depict women as inferior human beings. Furthermore, women's sufferings have been justified by appealing to the salvific significance of their suffering. A traditional example is found in the first letter to Timothy which reads:

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and loves and holiness, with modesty (1 Tim 2.11-15).

¹ Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, *Meeting God on the Cross. Christ, the Cross, and the Feminist Critique*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010.

For centuries women's suffering of different kind has been justified, based on the idea of its salvific meaning. As was the case in the teaching of the medieval church regarding the use of painkillers during labor, when, in line with God's words of punishment to Eve in the third chapter of Genesis, church leaders maintained that to use painkillers in order to reduce women's pain in childbearing would be against God's will.ⁱⁱ

Despite the abuse of theological arguments in order to justify women's suffering, women have been able to experience Jesus' solidarity with them not only in their suffering but also in their fight against unjust causes of their suffering. This is why the christological question, "Who do you say I am?", receives a response with yet another dimension, when answered from the perspective of women's experience of suffering. Hence, the Christ who sided with women as "the oppressed of the oppressed" reminds us that also today the knowledge of God is to be discerned in the midst of suffering. By identifying with the suffering women, the foreigner, the deserted, the sick, and the social outcast of our time, we are identifying with Christ among us.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time we are participating in God's ongoing struggle against injustice, inequality, and oppression.

Women's experience of suffering

When referring to women's experience, it is important to take into consideration the diversity of this experience, depending, among other things, on the cultural context and social location. In the past, men have generalized about human experience based on their own experience, and at the same time made women and their experience invisible. This is what Mary Daly argued had robbed women the power of naming their own experience.² But, just as Daly and other white feminists have criticized men for stealing the "power of naming their own experience" away from women, non-white women have turned the same argument against white and

² Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, endurprentun, Boston: Beacon Press, 1985, bls. 8.

privileged women, arguing that they have assumed that their own experience was representative for the experience of all women.³

Because our experience affects our understanding of Christ, and, furthermore, because women's experience has been excluded or misinterpreted within traditional Christology, it is necessary to reconsider specifically the role that experience plays in our interpretation of Jesus Christ. One need not accept Mary Daly's negative conclusion on the compatibility of feminism and Christology, in order to see her point about women's inability to "name their own experience" in the past. While I think it is important to recognize the issue of diversity in naming women's experience, I side with those who argue for basic commonalities in human experience in general, and more specifically in women's experience.^{iv} A helpful example of the universal aspect of suffering is, for example, given by the womanist theologian, Shawn Copeland. In her chapter "'Wading through Many Sorrows.' Toward a Theology of Suffering in Womanist Perspective", Copeland writes:

Glæra 3.

Suffering is universal, an inescapable fact of the human condition; it defies immunities of all kinds. Suffering despoils women and men irrespective of race or tongue, wealth or poverty, learning or virtue; disregards merit or demerit, reward or punishment, honor or corruption. Like sun and rain, suffering comes unbidden to the just and the unjust alike.^v

The experience of suffering is certainly basic to all human experience. Thus, despite different social and cultural situations, there are not only differences but also similarities in women's universal experiences of suffering.^{vi} The commonalities are, among other things, based on social structures of patriarchy which transcend racial and cultural differences. It is exactly this common experience of oppression--the experience of physical violence, humiliation, dependence, and isolation, as well as the experience of struggle for self-determination and responsibilities for

³ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989, bls. 195.

themselves--that play a key role for women doing theology from a feminist perspective.⁴

Feminist theologians have, despite their differences, agreed on the importance of experience, exactly because women have so frequently been silenced in the past. That is the main reason why they have stressed the importance of interpreting God's revelation, past and present, in light of women's experience.

Women have also pointed out the contradiction that exists between the gospel of Christ and women's experience of exclusion and denigration within the church, as well as out in the society. They argue that in this sense women's experience within the church mirrors their daily experience in patriarchal society. Furthermore, feminist theologians have drawn critical attention to the fact that women have been excluded, both *explicitly* and *implicitly*, from theological doctrines. When the question of gender has been raised explicitly within the theological tradition, for example in theological anthropology, it has been raised to women's disfavor.

Even if the Christian tradition has proved to be both multi-layered and androcentric, and repeatedly used against women, I do not agree with Mary Daly and others who think the abuse prevents the Christian message to be relevant in our time. Still the importance of a hermeneutic of suspicion is a key, also when it comes to the interpretation of the cross, which so often has been used in order to justify the oppression of the powerful. By interpreting the cross as a symbol of the kenosis of patriarchy, such oppression is rejected, and instead the cross is seen as a compelling criticism of the patriarchal understanding of power and masculinity.⁵

Glæra 4.

⁴ WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: summary report of initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses, Geneva: World Health Organization, 2005.

⁵ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, New York: Crossroad, 1992, bls. 160-161.

Kenosis of patriarchy

Focusing on the significance of Paul's understanding of power as the “power of the cross,” Sally B. Purvis has made an important contribution to a feminist retrieval of the cross. In her book *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community*, Purvis talks about Paul's commitment to form Christian communities in accordance with his understanding of the Christ event.^{vii} Key to Paul's understanding of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is, Purvis insists, a new understanding of power, the power of the cross, articulated most clearly in Paul's first letter to the community at Corinth.^{viii} Purvis names this new understanding of power, “power as life,”^{ix} while she calls the old understanding, which she believes was the widely accepted understanding of power in the first-century Roman Empire, “power as control.”^x Purvis writes:

God's power as shown forth in “Christ crucified” is the reversal of power as violent control. It is the power to bring life, even in the face of the worst, most destructive power that can be brought to bear.^{xi}

The “old standards,” the “wisdom of the world”, would call this power “weak,” since according to the traditional understanding of power as control, the cross stands for victimization, loss of power, or defeat.^{xii} On the contrary, to the new standard in the cross of Christ, this power is really the greatest power of all, the power of God.”^{xiii} This new understanding of power is a total reversal of the older one, in Purvis's own words: “a reality altogether different from the old understanding, as different as the cross is from the soldier's sword.”^{xiv} Therefore the power of the cross is not to be understood on the basis of our knowledge of power as control. The power of the cross is the power of life, as both *unexpected* (as we do not expect to look at death and discover life) and *ongoing* (because “we know about the power of the cross only from the continuing presence of the risen Christ among us, and Christian communities manifest that life in the world”). In line with Paul, who equates the power of God to the love of God, Purvis maintains that the power of the cross is

love.^{xv} We see this reversal of our understanding of power f.ex. in the images of Christa on the cross.

Christa – a Crucified Woman

Since the mid-seventies a number of images of a crucified female Christ (often referred to as *Christa*) have stimulated interesting discussions about contemporary interpretations of the passion story. At times the Christa-figures have called for strong reactions. While some have considered a female Christ-figure on the cross a powerful symbol of God's identification with suffering women today, other have thought it was nothing less than a gross misinterpretation, even a violation of the historical event, as well as the symbolic meaning of the cross of Christ. Christa-figures have pushed for important discussions about the meaning of the contextualization of the Christ-event, especially the gender-question. In those debates it has become clear how differently people tend to think about the issue of gender, when it comes to interpreting the story of Jesus Christ in a new (or changed) historical context, comparing to other historical particularities, such as race and class.^{xvi} Without doubt Christa-figures have made significant contributions to the Christological discourse during the past decades, and are still able to do that.

MYND 5: *Krista – Edwina Sandys*

One of the early female Christ figures was a bronze sculpture made **by Edwina Sandys** in 1974 for the *United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace*, from 1976-1985. Sandys' *Christa* "portrays a slumped female nude wearing a crown of thorns with arms outstretched depicting the cross."^{xvii} When the sculpture was exhibited at the side of the main altar in the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City during Holy Week in April of 1984, it caused strong reactions, which eventually called for its removal from the Cathedral after being there for less than two weeks.^{xviii}

MYND 6: *Crucified Woman– Almuth Lutkenhaus-Lackey*

Another representation of a crucified female Christ, created by **Almuth Lutkenhaus-Lackey**, was originally placed in the chancel of Bloor Street United Church in Toronto during Lent and Eastertide of 1979, but was later moved to the grounds of Emmanuel College in Toronto.^{xix} Lutkenhaus-Lackey's sculpture stimulated strong reactions, recounted in Doris Jean Dyke's book, entitled as the sculpture itself, *Crucified Woman* (1991).

Margaret Argyle made an image of Christa in celebration of the World Council of Churches Decade for Churches in Solidarity with Women, from 1988-1998. Her Christa was displayed in a service, celebrated in the cathedral in Manchester, England on October 24th, 1993. The title of Argyle's Christa, *Bosnian Christa*, interpreting the artist's reaction to the horrible abuse of women in the former Yugoslavia, when rape was systematically used as a weapon of war, and women were systematically raped and impregnated, during the war in the early nineties "A deep black wool backdrop is slit in its centre to reveal a bloodred opening framed by dark red crushed velvet curtain-like lips. Standing within the opening of the vulva is an elongated cross bearing a slim, stylized naked female." (J. Clague)

The *Bosnian Christa*, which was, unlike Lutkenhaus-Lackey's *Crucified Woman*, intended as a religious reflection on women's suffering, helped the sculptor, to reevaluate her conception of the cross and its role as a religious symbol. In her own words:

Previously I had not been able to use the cross in my work at all because I had thought it was a terribly overused symbol which had become almost meaningless to me... But the cross now has a meaning for me. It's about a God who is in the world and present wherever anyone suffers. That was an enormous revelation for me. I had never associated God with women and their suffering before...^{xx}

As in the case of the earlier Christa-figures, Argyle's Christa called for much attention and sometimes harsh reactions, including accusations of blasphemy with headlines such as 'Almighty row as "God" has a sex change'. Argyle suggested the negative reporting had to do with the decision made by the General Synod the year before, to ordain women to the ministerial priesthood in the Church of England.⁶

Symbol of Hope

Despite very strong negative reactions by some, the Christa-figures have become powerful symbols of hope and healing for many women, particularly for those who have suffered from sexual or domestic violence. Mary Grey, stresses the twofold role of the crucified woman, as it not only expresses God's solidarity with women in their suffering, but also encourages them to stand up and resist the sources of their oppression. This is why it did not come as a surprise to Grey when Edwina Sandys' *Christa* was embraced by many women as a symbol of hope in midst of their suffering. Grey explains:

Christ as Christa liberates not by condoning the suffering of abused women, or proclaiming that there is an innate redemptive quality in it; but by being present with and sharing in the brokenness, identifying this as the priority for God's healing love, Christ gives hope, empowers and enables the process of resistance.^{xxi}

Glæra 7.

Regardless of the original intentions of the artists, the strong connotation to the cross of Christ was unavoidable. Lutkenhaus-Lackey, for example, hesitated to lend her *Crucified Woman* to a church, because she intended it merely as a portrayal of human suffering. She eventually changed her mind when asked if she could see Christ in a Chinese man, a black man, or a woman, and was "deeply touched" by all

⁶ Sama rit, bls. 95.

the women who told her “that for the first time they had felt close to Christ, seeing suffering expressed in a female body.”^{xxii}

Negative reactions to the Christa-images shouldn't come as a surprise, given the strong emphasis on Jesus' maleness within the Christian tradition in the past. Until today, his maleness has f.ex. been used as an argument against women's ordination. This is why the Vatican insists that women can not become Christ's representatives, because they do not share the same sex as Jesus.⁷ Nevertheless, I think the “shock” which is caused by a suffering female body on the cross is able to help us deepen our understanding of the cross-event.

Glæra 8: með mynd frá ítalskri rape crisis hotline.

This picture of a naked woman in a cross-like position, was used few years ago in an advertisement from an Italian rape crisis hotline. Across the woman's waist is written the question: Who gets to pay for men's sins? It probably goes without saying that the reactions were quite strong, to say the least, and some criticized the picture for being “sexually provocative.”

In the responses to the Christa-figure, one can see reactions akin to the “trickster”-effect of the “gender-bender”-images, introduced by Eleanor McLaughlin. The shock and the scandal of a tortured women-body hanging on the cross, can truly help open up our eyes to the “symbolic power of the crucifix”, while it also reminds us of the sheer cruelty of “the original event”, which we so easily forget.^{xxiii} As such the Christa-figures have been significant as they have helped instigate the much needed feminist critique of a male-biased tradition. I am convinced that Christa-figures can continue to be important dialogue partners if we allow them to help us understand better the meaning of the cross-event in contexts, dominated by forces of injustice and oppression.

⁷ Louis Ligier, S.J., „The Question of Admitting Women to the Ministerial Priesthood“ *L'Osservatore Romano*. Weekly Edition in English, 2. mars 1978, bls. 5. (<http://www.ewtn.com/library/Theology/ORDWOMEN.HTM>) (Sótt: 1. maí 2012).

Resistance and Imitatio Christi

The importance of following Christ's example – or *Imitatio Christi*⁸– has been considered a necessary part of the Christian life from the beginning, even if people have had different opinions about what it implies. Amongst other things, Christians have disagreed about the right reaction in situations of injustice and oppression, in other words, what it means to imitate Christ in such situations. While some have pointed to Christ's unconditional demand to turn the other cheek, meaning to endure and not resist, others have insisted on the necessity to confront injustice with the intention to stop it, because that is exactly what Christ did. To imitate Christ is then not understood as passively enduring, but to actively resist injustice of any sort, without depending on violent means.

Indifference is truly something we should worry about in our western societies. All of us have probably heard stories about people passing by, instead of helping those who have been assaulted or hurt and need help. Those stories remind us of the story of the good Samaritan, when the priest and the Levite saw him lying there “half dead” and decided to pass by without helping him (Lúk 10.30-37). Too often people do hesitate to intervene when they are witnessing violence of some sort taking place next door – because they don't want to intrude on people's privacy. They also hesitate to intervene when somebody is being bullied, maybe because they are afraid of risking being bullied themselves.

Compassion- to be able to feel with somebody, can be passive, meaning to express solidarity, to listen to and to offer to go along with the one who is in pain, which can prove invaluable for the one who feels left alone in his or her suffering. But compassion can also be active, encouraging resistance and not submission to injustice. We have examples of both in the gospel stories. This is why *imitatio Christi*,

⁸ Thomas á Kempis (1380–1471) er höfundur bókarinnar *Imitatio Christi* sem kom fyrst út í upphafi 15. aldar. Í bókinni er að finna leiðbeiningar um það hvernig „hin kristna sál“ á að haga sér til að geta lifað fullkomnu lífi að fyrimynd Krists. Þessi bók hefur notið mikilla vinsælda á meðal kristinna í tæpar sex aldir.

or to follow Christ's example, can either mean to suffer with the suffering one (compassio) or to stand up and resist, hoping that eventually justice will prevail. Sometimes we need to be creative in order to come up with effective ways to practice nonviolent resistance, like Jesus certainly was.

When nonviolent resistance practiced by people like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the sixties, and Oscar Romero, archbishop in El Salvador from 1977 to 1980, is by many considered fully in line with the example of Christ, others disagree. Joanne Carlson Brown og Rebecca Parker have f.ex. criticized King and Romero for assuming the necessity of suffering, and, like, for example Abelard's moral influence theory, supposing innocent suffering can indeed transform perpetrators of violence and consequently bring an end to unjust suffering. Brown and Parker criticize this kind of theology for expecting innocent people to suffer in order to help the guilty ones recognize their evil doings. They think such a theology is simply wrong, because it makes victims the servants of the evildoers' salvation.

According to Brown og Parker suffering can never be justified. I, on the other hand, will argue that we need to make a clear distinction between thinking suffering is good in itself, and to be open to the fact that suffering can lead to something good. I think this is important to keep in mind, especially when we talk about individuals who have suffered, and even died, because of their fight against evil and injustice. King and Romero did not encourage their people to seek out suffering in itself, while they recognized that striving for justice could possible cause suffering and even death. They obviously assumed that suffering could lead to something good, even if they didn't think it was good in itself. Both of them were willing to go all the way, while there is hardly any reason to conclude that they were seeking to die, by risking their lives in their search for justice.

Nevertheless, I think Brown and Parker are right in their criticism of what has been labeled "a glorification of suffering," which has often been used to cover up oppression and abuse. This has been the case, f.ex. when victims of domestic violence have been sent back home to the abuser, in order to follow Christ by turning the other cheek. It is important never to underestimate the danger of implied in any kind of glorification of suffering, f.ex when women have been

encouraged to sacrifice themselves for a good cause. In this context it can be helpful to make a distinction like Brita Gill-Austern does, between self-sacrifice and self-giving, because how harmful self-sacrifice has often been to women.

Fully recognizing the experience of both harmful and helpful use of the idea of self-sacrifice for women, Brita Gill-Austern has suggested, what I think is a constructive distinction between *self-sacrifice* and *self-giving*. She writes:

A complex web of social forces compels women to sacrifice themselves in ways that can do great damage to their lives and the lives of the people they touch. Nevertheless, women need to resist the increasingly wide-spread tendency to condemn all forms of self-giving. Self-sacrifice is not pernicious by definition; it is not always a manifestation of codependency. Self-sacrifice can be an essential element of authentic, faithful love – the self-fulfilling self-transcendence to which Jesus calls us.”^{xxiv}

I think Gill-Austern is right when she argues that even if self-sacrifice has often turned out be harmful to women, it does not mean it necessarily has to be so. It is not only unrealistic to think that we can do away with self-sacrificing, in the sense of *self-giving* behaviour, but, more importantly, not desirable. But only if the person has the freedom to decide for oneself. I also agree with JoAnne Marie Terrell when she claims that self-sacrifice can only become a meaningful and constructive deed, when the subject is free to choose. Terrell explains: “Sacrifice understood as the surrender or destruction of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim is not genuinely that unless it involves one’s own agency ...”^{xxv}

It is certainly true that love understood as self-sacrifice can lead women to abdicate their public responsibility to use their God-given gifts on behalf of the greater community and for the common good.^{xxvi} Nevertheless, history is full of examples of women who have not hesitated to participate in active resistance to

injustice even if it has caused them suffering and pain.^{xxvii} Borrowing Kathryn Tanner's definition of the modern idea of sacrifice as being primarily a "non-cultic act involving self-renunciation for others",^{xxviii} I agree with those who think self-sacrifice on behalf of women can be good, and even necessary at times.^{xxix} Motherhood is an important example. In a recent article, where she suggests the idea of *maternal sacrifice* as a "hermeneutic of the cross", Mary J. Streufert argues that even if "maternal" does not ordinarily mean "mortal sacrifice", as it used to, "women who choose to be mothers are nevertheless actively sacrificing."^{xxx} Streufert maintains that women are indeed active, and not passive, in the "drama" of motherhood and quotes the feminist scholar Catherine MacKinnon to support her argument. MacKinnon makes an important explication on the contemporary understanding of motherhood, as she writes: "To treat motherhood as something that just happens denies a woman's participation in conception, her decision to carry a child to term, her nurturing and sacrifice for months, and the labor of birthing."^{xxxi} Even if McKinnon focuses on the experience of pregnancy and birth, it should go without saying that the idea of motherhood as active "maternal sacrifice" qualifies for the experience of child-rearing as well.

MYND9: Madres de Plaza de Mayo

The womanist theologian, Katie Cannon, reinforces the importance of the context when it comes to any talk about self-sacrifice and suffering. Cannon reminds us how radically different it is to talk about accepting suffering and making sacrifices for a principle when one is in a position to choose to suffer, as opposed to "the masses of Black people," for whom "suffering is the normal state of affairs."^{xxxii} Still, black people and other marginalized people have been willing to stand up and resist, even if it might cause them suffering. By participating in nonviolent resistance, when suffering is inevitable, people have expressed "willingness to take it on oneself rather than to inflict it on others; not retaliating to violence with violence."^{xxxiii}

Glæra 9 og 10

There are numerous examples of such a resistance, for example from the civil rights movement under the leadership of Martin Luther King, and from El Salvador under the leadership of bishop Oscar Romero.

Glæra 11

Another example of such resistance are the mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. A group of women in 1977 started marching silently for thirty minutes every Thursday afternoon on a large public square in front of the presidential palace, in the heart of Buenos Aires, requesting fair trials for their children who disappeared during a military dictatorship, which ended in 1983.^{xxxiv} What started out as a small group of fourteen mothers, became an internationally recognized movement, which until today has worked to expose what happened to the estimated 30.000 missing children and grandchildren. Some of the women disappeared themselves as a result of their resistance. But the mothers and grandmothers kept on, and since the year 2000, they have seen more trials being held and some of the perpetrators being convicted. And their search for justice goes on.^{xxxv}

The Decade to Overcome Violence

It is absolutely necessary that church communities as well as theologians within academic settings make serious attempts to address people in their suffering situations.^{xxxvi} It is particularly important that they respond to women's experience of suffering related to domestic or sexual violence, not only because it has been silenced for so long, but also because it has often been justified on theological grounds.

Glæra 12

There has always been a strong tendency to silence women's experience, particularly their experience of oppression and abuse. Churches and other faith communities have been slow in responding to the danger many women are faced with, due to violence and abusive behavior. Initiatives by large church communities have signaled an increasing awareness of the problem. As a follow-up to the

Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women 1988-1998, the World Council of Churches (WCC) decided to confront the challenge of violence directly, by establishing a *Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace*, (2001-2010).^{xxxvii} While the WCC focused on manifold expressions of violence, violence perpetrated against women and children was among their target concerns. Margot Kässmann, the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hanover, Germany, and a member of the Central Committee of the WCC states in her book *Overcoming Violence. The Challenge to the Churches in All Places*: “The inability of churches to deal with domestic violence is one of clearest indicator of the urgency of a *Decade to Overcome Violence* for the churches.”^{xxxviii}

Following the WCC’s initiative, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), in its document *Churches say ‘NO’ to Violence against Women. Action Plan for the Churches* from 2002, called its member churches to act on behalf of violated women. By offering this contribution to the WCC decade against violence, LWF sought to direct the focus of the international church community to the effect violence is having on women in their home as well as in the church and the society at large. In the foreword to the document the General Secretary of LWF, Ishmael Noko, depicts violence against women as a theological problem, and not simply a social one. Noko writes: “When those who are victimized suffer, so does God. Let us work together to overcome all forms of violence that are an offense against God and humanity.”^{xxxix}

In his book, *Jesus and Nonviolence. A Third Way* Walter Wink stresses the important differentiation between nonviolence and nonresistance. It is simply not a choice between fight or flight, Wink insists.⁹ This is why he talks about a “third way”, which consists of an active resistance without violence. Wink maintains we see in the gospels what the third way is all about, because it is what Jesus practiced and paid for by his life. Jesus never used violence, neither to defend himself, nor somebody else, but chose to fight against injustice by resort to other means.¹⁰

⁹ Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence. A Third Way*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, bls. 12.

¹⁰ Sama rit, bls. 13–14.

Glæra 13

“There is nothing romantic about violence”, said Mvume Dandala bishop from South Africa, when the World Council of Churches launched the Peace to the City campaign in Johannesburg in August 1997. There is nothing romantic about non-violent resistance, argues Margot Kässmann, then bishop in Germany, in her book, *Overcoming Violence. The Challenge to the Churches in All Places*. She writes:

Violence is not going to disappear from human life once and for all, but Christians can set signs of the reality of God’s kingdom in our world. Struggling to overcome violence in the knowledge that violence exists is an attitude of hope. It is not naiveté or foolish utopianism, but an element of Christian hope being put into practice (Kässmann, 5).

Non-violence is not non-resistance, and non-violence needs training, argues Kässmann. Because no-body knows how he or she will react to violence, we all need to prepare ourselves, in other words we need to practice non-violent reaction.¹¹ That is why we need training in prevention and mediation, as well as conflict resolution. In her book Kässmann writes about the prerequisite of nonviolence, which is first of all respecting the humanity of those involved. In all situations violence should be rejected, but when suffering is unavoidable, those who are practicing nonviolence need to be ready to suffer, instead of causing suffering to other people. It is also important to believe that everybody is capable of changing their minds, but also to admit that nobody has a monopoly on truth itself, which is why the goal should always be to bring together the truth of both parties. Under all circumstances everything should be on the table and no hidden agendas should be allowed.

¹¹ Sama rit, bls. 60

The cross and the resurrection

MYND 14: The cross of María Gomez

Probably most of you have seen this cross from El Salvador before. It was painted in memory of María Cristina Gómez. Here we see a close relationship between the cross event and the resurrection. Without the resurrection, the cross remains an example of one more victim of evil; of one more person who lost her/his life for a good cause. That is why it is crucial to keep the close relationship between the cross and the resurrection, between the cross and our hope for the final victory of life over death, good over evil.

María Gomez spent her life fighting for a better living conditions for women in El Salvador. She particularly cared about women who were victims of rape or suffered from domestic violence. Among other things, she taught them to read. Eventually Gómez was murdered by her opponents in the year of 1989. This cross is a sign of hope, because of the story told by the pictures of the cross. It is a sign of hope for those who want to improve the living conditions of victims of violence and abuse. This is not only a story of the power of evil amongst us, and the sufferings caused by it; but a story of the power of non-violent resistance. It is also an encouragement to us all, an encouragement to follow to *imitatio Christi*, not to give up, but to stand up and resist evil, holding on to our hope that good will eventually prove stronger than evil.

ⁱLaCugna, "God in Communion with Us," 99.

ⁱⁱ Ramshaw, *Treasures Old and New*, 128.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mt 25.31-46.

^{iv} See Moltmann-Wendel and Moltmann, *God - His & Hers*, 78; Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 65-67.

^v Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 109.

^{vi} See Hall, *God & Human Suffering*, 57. Hall makes a helpful distinction between suffering "as becoming" or "integrative suffering", and suffering "which detracts from life" or "disintegrative suffering" (ibid., 67-68).

^{vii} Purvis, *The Power of the Cross*, 49.

^{viii} Ibid., 13.

^{ix} Purvis has chosen Paul as an early messenger of the power of the cross as the power of life, "first because his letters offer us the clearest picture of a group of people struggling to understand and embody a 'new world,' a world shaped by a power that seemed odd and surprising and that called forth new ways of being together in community. Second, Paul's letters, especially 1 Corinthians 1, offer a sustained if not a systematic discussion of the cross and its implications for Christians' understanding and embodiment of power" (ibid, 39).

^x Ibid., 13. Explaining what she means by "power as control," Purvis writes: "Power as control assumes the superiority and the greater entitlement of one or some over another or others. By its very nature, power as control undermines and abrogates the commitment to fundamental, if minimal, equality to which all Christians are obligated. Therefore, power as control cannot function as the basis for a Christian ethic of community without deep and violent self-contradiction. Yet such power has been and is the most prevalent understanding and practice of power within Christian community" (ibid., 21).

^{xi} Ibid., 50.

^{xii} Ibid., 74.

^{xiii} Ibid., 51.

^{xiv} Ibid.,

^{xv} Ibid., 77.

^{xvi} It is interesting to note that the literal meaning of the latin noun, *traditio*, is "that which has been handed down or over", or "the act of handing down or over." (McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 14).

^{xvii} Clague, "The Christa: Symbolizing My Humanity and My Pain," 84-85. See also:

<http://www.yorku.ca/finearts/news/edwinasandys.htm> and

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,954312,00.html>

^{xviii} Clague, "The Christa: Symbolizing My Humanity and My Pain," 87.

^{xix} Ibid., 87-90.

^{xx} Clague, "The Christa: Symbolizing My Humanity and My Pain," 97.

^{xxi} Quoted by Clague, see *ibid.*, 106.

^{xxii} Dyke, *Crucified Woman*, 3.

^{xxiii} Ibid., 107.

^{xxiv} Gill-Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice and Self-Denial: What Does It Do to Women?" 259. See also Ramsey, "Preaching to Survivors to Child Sexual Abuse," who writes: "Sacrificial love voluntarily chosen for a period of time is put in its proper place as a means toward restoring mutual love and care..." (68)

^{xxv} Terrell, "Our Mothers' Gardens. Rethinking Sacrifice," 45.

^{xxvi} Gill-Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice and Self-Denial: What Does It Do to Women?" 313.

^{xxvii} Johnson, *She Who Is*, 256.

^{xxviii} Tanner, "Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice," 50.

^{xxix} Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 60.

^{xxx} Streufert, "Maternal Sacrifice as a Hermeneutics of the Cross," 72.

^{xxxi} Quoted by Streufert, see *ibid.*, 72.

^{xxxii} Quoted by Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 159.

^{xxxiii} Kässmann, *Overcoming Violence*, 60.

^{xxxiv} Hunt, "Dead but still missing: Mothers of Plaza de Mayo transform Argentina," 89-96.

^{xxxv} See: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/04/26/mothers-plaza-de-mayo-justice-disappeared-loved-ones-one-step-a-long-time.html>

^{xxxvi} An important example is Gutiérrez's book *On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (1987).

^{xxxvii} See: <http://overcomingviolence.org/>

^{xxxviii} Kässmann, *Overcoming Violence*, 45.

^{xxxix} Churches Say 'No' to Violence against Women. *Action Plan for the Churches*, 5.