







Latin American Council of Churches  
United Nations Population Fund

# THE CHURCHES AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Training manual on Sexual and Reproductive Rights for  
Churches and Ecumenical Organisations.

Translated from spanish to english by a Rita Vieitez.  
On request of and founded by Church of Sweden

## Church of Sweden

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# INTRODUCTION

This material is the result of a consistent process of collaboration between CLAI – Latin American Council of Churches- and UNFPA LACRO –United Nations Population Fund.

Within the framework of the Regional Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Annual Workplan 2012, UNFPA has verified the need to carry on with the efforts to respond in an increasingly more effective way to the strategy of mutual cooperation and partnership with Faith-based Organizations (its mandate especially refers to Action Programme of CAIRO); in the context of the institutional guidelines, which mainly aim at identifying the common areas of work between UNFPA and FBOs, prioritizing the work at a country programme level so as to promote the execution of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), and to join the process of evaluation of results of Cairo +20 and from 2014 onwards.

The coming together of institutions pertaining to the system of the United Nations and other state and official agencies, and the FBOs has to do with a historical process of dialogue and common interests and spaces, but it is also the reflection and acknowledgement that Faith-based Organizations play an important role in the community and are trustworthy, as well as capable of contributing to the transformation of society through education, service and the public influence of their prophetic voice.

The facts and problems related to Sexual and Reproductive Rights which have been the reason for this working partnership and the production of this material are profound and complex, which requires a special treatment in order to achieve a change of attitude within the Churches and Ecumenical organizations and from there, to their communities.

In fact, to reach out to the FBOs so that they make a pronouncement or take a stand concerning these issues shows us how difficult the problem with SRHR is and what a contribution we can make as a FBO.

At this point in history it is urgent and necessary for the FBOs to be able to dialogue, reflect and act concerning these controversial topics which struggle between ideal and real.

We believe, as faith-based persons and institutions, in principles and values which motivate both our calling and our work to build up a speech and develop a practice coherent with the building of just, satisfactory and abundant life in the field of Human Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

We rejoice at this strategic working partnership aimed at facilitating the creation of abilities, competence, knowledge and above all, the empowering of Sexual and

Reproductive Rights, as well as an alignment within the Churches and ecumenical organizations –both CLAI members and non-members. We are very hopeful and optimistic about this FPNU-CLAI initiative.

In this process, CLAI, as an organization which holds a cooperation partnership with UNFPA LACRO, has committed itself to submitting a Continental Consultation on the issue : “Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights”, based on the results and data collected in eleven National Consultations, which adopted and analysed each of the topics of SRR in the document from the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which is part of the agenda of the Cairo Programme of Action

The purpose of the National Consultations was to reflect upon the topics of Sexual and Reproductive Rights, taking the focus on human rights as well as cultural and gender sensitivity as a frame of reference, and to provide data to make the Document “Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights”, which will be introduced in the Continental Consultation taking place in Havana this year.

In the light of these premises, we submit this material to the consideration of the churches and ecumenical organizations for addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Rights, based on a socio-critical reflection, with Biblical reflections for the approach of these complex, yet necessary issues in order to lead our communities to a better understanding and experiencing of SRR, focused on building a more dignified, just and human society in alignment with the values of God’s Kingdom.

*Bishop Julio Murray*  
*President*  
*Latin American Council of Churches*

*Rev. Nilton Giese*  
*General Secretary*  
*Latin American Council of Churches*

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The editorial committee of “Signos de Vida” magazine, who enlightened this document with their methodological and theological lights.

The people who contributed with their theological and technical reflections in the national meetings, giving us a broader vision of Sexual and Reproductive Rights

The voices of pain, anger and death; but also of hope, coming from our indigenous, mestizo, black and white America, which cry out for a more equitable, just and dignified world; with fulfilled human rights, in accordance to the message of the Gospel of peace and God’s diaphanous dream.

Rvd. Carlos Tamez Luna

Dr. Eduardo Campaña Medina

# PRESENTATION **OF THIS GUIDE**

## **Purpose**

To offer a tool to the Churches and ecumenical organizations so as to facilitate and create spaces for reflection, empowering and organisation as regards Sexual and Reproductive Rights in ecclesiastical communities, from a theological and pastoral perspective.

## **Fundaments**

This guide was created as a result of the deep-felt need to involve the churches and ecumenical organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean to exert an influence in a real and specific way in the face of the problems and consequences experienced daily by our peoples and communities –especially women- when it comes to issues of Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

## **Objectives**

- To strengthen the ability of the churches and ecumenical organizations to foster changes in their communities concerning Sexual and Reproductive Rights.
- To provide the pastors and leaders of the churches and ecumenical organizations with the knowledge, abilities and skills so that they can respond effectively and efficiently to problems related to SRR.
- To encourage an understanding and a critical look upon the factors which cause the inequalities and injustices behind the high mortality and sickness rates related to the unfulfillment and infringement of SRR.
- To offer the churches and ecumenical organizations these Biblical and liturgical resources for reflection, understanding and empowerment for building the Kingdom, through their educational, pastoral and prophetic role regarding SRR.

## **How does this guide originate?**

The production of this material is part and an outcome of a collaborative project between the Latin American Council of Churches –CLAI and the United Nations Population Fund –UNFPA LACRO, who decided, through a long collaborative pro-

cess, to carry out a consultation on the issue “The churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights” with the CLAI members -churches and ecumenical organizations in eleven countries.

During 2012 the eleven appointed countries held activities, each of them carrying out a consultative process on a specific sexual and reproductive right.

The present material has been produced by collecting relevant data, in accordance with the methodology of the “See, Judge and Act” work method. Therefore, this guide is based on the reflections, statements and recommendations of the churches and ecclesiastical organizations which took part in the National Consultations.

## **Organization of the guide**

This guide is divided into “meetings”. Why?

Because a meeting is time and space with God father and mother, with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Because a meeting is time and space to reflect and be touched by the Word.

Because a meeting is time and space with my neighbour and me.

Because a meeting is time and space for communion and community.

Because a meeting is time and space to give thanks and celebrate.

Because a meeting is time and space for change and renewal.

Because a meeting is time and space to learn and unlearn.

Because a meeting is time and space which encourages us and challenges us to commitment and hope.

## **How to use this guide**

This guide contains 12 meetings.

A general view and understanding of Sexual and Reproductive Rights is provided in the first meeting.

In the following meetings, we work on a different right each, which corresponds to the National consultation held in each country.

Each meeting is divided into four methodological moments, related to the right being discussed.

### **1. Opening and presentation**

The opening of the meeting starts with a “greeting and invitation”, written in the country where the Consultation took place, to work on the specific right. This is followed by a liturgical moment which consists of a chant, a motivational reading and a prayer.

In the second section of the opening part, the purposes or objectives of the meeting are introduced and so are the participants, who also reach agreements for a harmonious atmosphere and better use of the working time.

### **2. From a specific reality we begin a dialogue with our reality**

An active and comprehensive reading of the situation presented in each country is provided, as regards the right being dealt with and SRR in general.

A set of questions favour reflection and make us ponder on why reality is as it is, and the relationship with the reality of each country.

### **3. Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

There follows the reading of (a) Biblical text(s), upon which we reflect in connection with the right being dealt with. A short commentary is presented and finally, an activity to present specific proposals for the local work in the churches.

#### 4. Finishing the meeting

An assessment of the activity is made, in oral and written form, as well as the closing of the liturgy, which consists of a chant, a reading text and a prayer of departure and farewell.

In the section of annexes, we find some documents produced in other Consultations which were not part of the CLAI-UNFPA project and provide a significant contribution to the reflection and understanding of the SRR, such as:

**Venezuela:** Manifesto on SRR from the Churches and Ecumenical Organizations in Venezuela.

**Puerto Rico:** Causes and pastoral challenges in the face of femicide.

In the same section we have a part with some biblical studies presented in the national meetings, valuable tools to support biblical reflection and SRR. Also, liturgical resources have been added (chants and readings), which contribute to the work in the meetings.

On the back inside cover comes a CD with PDF documents to print. It contains the readings for the work of each meeting, the assessment sheets, the talks and biblical reflections presented in the national meetings. In addition, there is a songbook which might be printed and handed out to the participants.

#### Recommendations for the facilitators

*“The success of a teaching-learning process lies in the handling of small details”.*

We allow ourselves to make the following recommendations, so that each meeting is more qualitative and effective:

- To organize in a team, preferably mixed, makes a great difference in the process of facilitating and achieving the goals. Advantages are important: responsibilities and chores are divided according to each person's qualities and abilities, facilitators accompany and take care of each other, are attentive to omissions, assess the progress and difficulties encountered. While one person is at work, the others can monitor the progress, take care of logistics, prepare the next step, etc.
- With enough time in advance, the facilitators must know the manual/guide, the way it is structured, the group activities, the songs, etc. They must read and study the concepts underlying each meeting, supported by the articles attached in the annexes and the bibliography.
- The facilitators must know and become very familiar with all the documents attached in the CD, so as to benefit from them in the best way possible.

*The texts to be read by the groups in each activity must be printed before every meeting. The Assessment sheet must also be printed. These documents are attached in the CD in PDF format.*

- Each participant must have a notebook and a Bible.
- Facilitating audiovisual tasks: computer, multimedia projector, or simply boards with the most relevant points in the comments or the rights to be explained.
- We suggest that the facilitators write a registry of the participants' expectations at the beginning of each workshop and place it in a visible spot until the end of the meeting, for all to check together whether expectations were met.

*An important step to be considered at the opening of the meeting is the establishment of “coexistence agreements”, or rules of the game. It is a collective activity, since it is the full group who commits to their own terms and agreements. This step can be carried out by “brainstorming” or other group activities. The purpose is for the participants to make recommendations about the attitudes to stick to in order to make the most of the time of work. These nearly always come up: switching off mobile phones, sticking to the timetables, being quiet when someone is talking, respecting other people’s opinions, participating actively, etc. Those recommendations which the group comes up with should be written on a board and placed somewhere visible during the whole meeting.*

- Start from the principle that you will not teach, but facilitate, so as to promote a dynamic learning process to achieve specific actions and transformations regarding the topic. Individual reflection must be integrated into the group’s.
- The fundamental element in the meeting is not delivering information but facilitating the process of skill development, i.e. a harmonious, co-creating process between the facilitators and the participants in the group.
- We suggest that each workshop consists of no more than 25 participants, since a higher number limits the adequate application of the method, resulting in a lower level of learning. It is possible to work with larger groups when a team of facilitators is formed and there is more time available.
- Although each workshop has been designed to work for two to three hours, the facilitator is free to dedicate as much time as he or she considers necessary to go in depth into any topic.
- This guide suggests activities to facilitate each unit, but the facilitator is free to modify them, as well as to add new texts to be read, questions or Biblical texts related to the right to work on, materials, group activities, etc.
- In the case of Ecumenical Theological Seminaries, all the activities can be complemented and reinforced with biblical theological studies, pronouncements by various churches, etc.
- Every group work must have a coordinator, a secretary and a narrator. Make sure that different people take different roles in each group activity.
- When arranging the participants into groups, make sure that each group is formed differently from how it was in the previous activities.

*The suggested methodology in the part “Reading about what we observe in the country” is extremely important. The facilitator must explain the instructions clearly, as well as the importance of doing it in such a way, since this allows a better understanding and analysis of the text.*

- The biblical texts used in the meetings are from the version “NRSV (New Revised Standard Version)”

## **GLOSSARY**

<b>ICPD:</b>	International conference on Population and Development.
<b>CLAI:</b>	Latin American Council of Churches.
<b>HHRR:</b>	Human rights.
<b>SRR:</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Rights.
<b>NRSV:</b>	New Revised Standard Version.
<b>IVF:</b>	In Vitro Fertilization.
<b>STI:</b>	Sexually Transmitted Infections.
<b>LGBTT:</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Transvestite.
<b>MMFP:</b>	Modern Methods of Family Planning.
<b>FBO:</b>	Faith-based Organizations.
<b>WHO:</b>	World Health Organization.
<b>NGO:</b>	Non-governmental Organization.
<b>UNO:</b>	United Nations Organization.
<b>PAHO:</b>	Pan American Health Organization.
<b>AIDS:</b>	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.
<b>SRH:</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health.
<b>RHT:</b>	Reproductive Health Techniques.
<b>UNFPA:</b>	United Nations Population Fund.
<b>HIV:</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection.

# Meeting 1

## Rights...are rights

*“Sexual and Reproductive Rights are Human Rights interpreted from the point of view of sexuality and reproduction. Sexual health, as well as reproductive health is a fundamental part of every person’s rights to enjoy, at the highest level possible, their physical and mental health”.*

### Opening and presentation

#### Greeting and invitation

Moved by the Holy Spirit, who inspires us and stirs us!

Moved by the love of the Father, who summons us ...to love without conditions!

Moved by the passion, the dignity and justice for which Jesus came to fight and advocate. Moved by the pledge to build a world where respect and dignity are fixed values, we invite and challenge churches and ecumenical organizations to work for the validity and fulfilment of SRHR.

#### Opening chant

Several chants were suggested during the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use them, otherwise find one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2).

#### Collective reading

CREED OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS

I believe that every person is born free  
and equal in dignity and rights.

I believe that all human beings have rights:  
to life, to freedom and personal safety

I believe that no person can be arbitrarily  
Arrested, detained or exiled.

I believe that every person has the right to take part  
In the direction of the public affairs of their country

I believe that every person has the right to work  
To associate with others and form organizations

For the promotion and defence of their legitimate interests  
I believe that every person has the right

To a life of dignity to ensure  
Their health and well-being, and their family's  
I believe that every person has the right  
to education, information and expression.  
I believe that every person has the right to  
Maintain, express and spread their ideas and their faith.  
(Cardinal Raúl Silva Enríquez. Chile)

### **We become stronger through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to pray, putting the meeting in God's hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of the meeting:

1. To know the origins and history of SRR.
2. To reflect on the importance of fulfilling SRR.
3. To see the importance of SRR in the light of the Bible.
4. To make proposals for SRR education.

### **About the participants**

Group activity: The facilitator invites all the participants to sit on chairs, forming a circle, the number of chairs must be one less than the number of participants; he or she assigns each participant the name of a fruit. The fruits must be repeated, i.e. given the same name to several people.

Next, he or she explains how to do the exercise: the facilitator begins to tell an (invented) story; each time that the name of fruit is said, the people who have that particular name change seats (the one who was standing at the beginning of the game tries to sit now); but if the word "basket" is said in the story, then everybody must change seats. The person who cannot have a seat must introduce himself/herself<sup>1</sup>.

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite participants to make a list of ten do's and don'ts, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

## **From a specific reality, we begin a dialogue with our reality**

*Texts to read: What are Sexual and Reproductive rights and where do they come from? as well as the declaration of the aforementioned rights out loud, in groups of four.*

### **What are sexual and reproductive rights and where do they come from?**

Sexual and Reproductive Rights (SRR) are Human Rights interpreted from the perspective of sexuality and reproduction. "Sexual health, as well as reproductive health are a fundamental part of every person's rights, to enjoy, at the highest level possible, their physical and mental health"<sup>2</sup>. They can also be defined in terms of power and resources: "the power to make informed decisions about their own fertility, procrea-

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.chicosygrandes.com/dinamicas-presentacion/cesta-de-frutas/>

<sup>2</sup> Resolución 2003/28. Comisión de Derechos Humanos de las Naciones Unidas. [http://www.iidh.ed.cr/comunidades/derechosmujer/docs/dm\\_onuseguimiento/resolucin%20c%20deh%20salud.pdf](http://www.iidh.ed.cr/comunidades/derechosmujer/docs/dm_onuseguimiento/resolucin%20c%20deh%20salud.pdf)

tion and care of the children, gynecological health and sexual activity, as well as the resources required to put those decisions into practice in a safe and effective way<sup>3</sup>.

Human rights are essentially dynamic and their reach broadens permanently to the extent in which people reconsider their needs and wishes correspondingly to these. The general theory of human rights is based on the dignity of human beings and it hopes to balance up the hierarchical forms of association; in the beginning it aimed at protecting the individual from the power of the state, as well as controlling that power.

However, the fulfilment and validity of the human rights for everybody is still an aspiration for which we have to continue working. There are, in our societies, several biological or socio cultural factors which make us different and our societies have built forms of discrimination, subordination and marginalization upon these and other differences, which turn into social inequality. Some examples, among others, are age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities, social and economic condition.

Human rights, as expressed before, are universal rights based on the freedom, dignity and equality which are inherent to all human beings. Since health is a fundamental human right, sexual health is a basic human right. In order to ensure the development of a healthy sexuality in human beings and societies, sexual rights must be acknowledged, promoted, respected and defended by all societies, by all possible means<sup>4</sup>.

The origin of the concept “Reproductive Rights” was born in the frame of the United Nations and the World Health Organization during the Tehran Conference in 1968 as well as in the Bucharest definition (Conference on Population, in 1974), where it was defined as a fundamental right of every couple and individual as well. Family planning was included and integrated in the field of reproductive rights and health for the first time in the International Conference on Better Health for Women and children through Family Planning in Nairobi, Kenya (5th to 9th October, 1987).

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo on September 1994, offers the following definition of reproductive rights: “Reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents”<sup>5</sup>.

The Agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development of Cairo (1994) also acknowledged the right of adolescents to sex education and appropriate health services for them. Attention was focused again on the concept of Sexual and Reproductive Rights, the same one which was included as a human right; 184 countries subscribed to the Programme of Action, committing to make every necessary effort to adopt the measures outlined in the Programme.

Also, in the Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995) this definition was expanded in the following way:

*“Sexual rights include the human right of women to have control over and decide*

---

<sup>3</sup> Correa y Petchesky, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Declaración del 13avo. Congreso Mundial de Sexología, 1997, Valencia, España revisada y aprobada por la Asamblea General de la Asociación Mundial de Sexología, WAS, el 26 de agosto de 1999, en el 14º Congreso Mundial de Sexología, Hong Kong, República Popular China <http://www.indetectable.org/pages/dersex.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Programa de Acción de la Conferencia Internacional sobre Población y Desarrollo, El Cairo, Egipto, 5-13 de septiembre, 1994, Doc. De la ONU A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1 (1995)

*freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence”.*

### **Statement of Sexual and Reproductive Rights**

1. The right to life: no woman’s life should be put at risk or endangered by reason of pregnancy or labour.
2. The right to liberty and Security of the Person: no woman can be subjected to practices like genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, abortion or sterilization without her consent.
3. The right to equality, and to be free from all forms of discrimination, even in the sexual and reproductive spheres.
4. The right to privacy: all sexual and reproductive health care services must remain confidential.
5. The right to freedom of thought: related to sexual and reproductive matters.
6. The right to information and education: including access to full education as to the benefits, risks and effectiveness of family planning.
7. The right to choose whether or not to marry and to found and plan a family: no woman can be obliged to marry against her will.
8. The right to decide whether to have children and when to have them: ensuring the access of all persons to contraceptive methods.
9. The right to health care and health protection: including women’s right to protection from traditional practices which are harmful to health.
10. The right to the benefits of scientific progress: including the appropriate reproductive health care technology.
11. The right to freedom of assembly and participation: including the right to influence governments to place a priority on health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights and the right not to be subjected to torture and mistreatment; including the rights of women, men, adolescents and children to be protected from violence, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

### **Questions on the text about Sexual and Reproductive rights**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading. The answers are presented to all. discussions with the whole group.

### **Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

**Text for reflection:** Amos 5:7-15 (New revised standard version)

<sup>7</sup>Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground. <sup>8</sup>The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name. <sup>10</sup>They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. <sup>12</sup>For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins –you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate. <sup>13</sup>Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such

a time; for it is an evil time. <sup>14</sup>Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said <sup>15</sup>Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

### **From life and the biblical text**

1. What words stand out in the text?
2. Do you find a connection between these words and Human Rights?
3. Do you think that the issues of SRR should be known and discussed in the churches?  
Why? Why not?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### **Commentary**

#### **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS?**

Although the Bible does not present a catalogue of human rights, it becomes evident from the Old Testament that God manifested a special predilection for the poor, the weak, the orphans, the widows, the foreigners (displaced persons), in a word, for the needy. The legislation in the Leviticus is clear in this sense; prophets speak of the justice of God in favour of the needy.

Likewise, in the New Testament, Jesus acts in favour of the poor, who are blessed because they have God as their King (Mt 5:3), and above all, He shows in his own life that there is no reason to discriminate anyone due to their female condition, or their race, or trade, or for being a sinner or a prostitute. In the Biblical text there are no abstract norms, but the project of God is presented in his relationships with His people, and in the relationships of that people with God and the other men and women.

The ethical-juridical notion of human rights is previous to the moral values of the economic, cultural or political ethics, because all these fields of social ethics are based on the fundamental rights of men.

To a person of faith, the foundation of human rights lies, as we have said, in their origin: created by God in his image, according to his liking (Gn 1:26), as stated by the Creed of Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

#### **CREED OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

We believe that all persons are entitled to a full life, remembering that God created us to live in dignity and abundance.

We believe that all persons have the right to freedom of thought, decision and action, remembering that God has created us as free beings and able to make choices.

We believe that all persons have the right to build equal relationships with each other in terms of sexuality and reproduction involving full respect for personal integrity and mutual responsibility to the consequences of sexual behaviour.

We believe that all persons have the right to make decisions regarding their sexuality and reproduction safely, free from discrimination, coercion or violence.

We believe that all persons have the right to privacy in their expression of sexual intimacy.

We believe that all persons have the right to information and knowledge of their sexual and reproductive rights.

We believe that all persons have the right to comprehensive and non-sexist sex education which enables them to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights positively and responsibly.

We believe that all persons have the right to sexually associate freely, to choose

whether to marry, to choose whether to divorce, and to establish other types of responsible sexual association.

We believe that all persons have the right to make responsible reproductive decisions, to form and plan a family or not, to decide to have children or not, and when to have them, to have access to methods of fertility regulation.

We believe that all persons have the right to a higher standard of Sexual and Reproductive Health, to receive information and the benefits of scientific progress for better medical care to ensure their physical integrity.

We believe that all persons have the right to control and enjoy their body, without being subjected to torture, mistreatment, mutilation, exploitation or sexual abuse.

We believe that all persons have the right to satisfy their basic needs for affection, good treatment, care and pleasure, allowing their physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual well being.

We believe that all persons have the right to emotional sexual expression through contact, communication, emotional expression and love.

*Amós López Rubio – National Consultation, Argentina.*

### **Tasks and commitments**

WORK ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What actions can we take so that these rights are well-known and spread in our ecclesiastical communities, church organizations, communities and authorities?
2. Try to write in a list three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary session in a creative way.

## **Finishing the meeting**

### **Assessment**

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. –(Annexes 3)

### **Closing the liturgy**

Closing canticle  
(Annexes 2)

### **We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 2

# Life: is there anything more important?

*“The right to life: no woman’s life can be at risk by pregnancy or labour”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from the Dominican Republic

From the hot and spicy Dominican Republic, we offer to the Faith-based Organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean these materials related to the Right to Life:

“no woman’s life can be at risk by pregnancy or labour”, for use in faith-based organizations –churches, seminaries, ecclesiastical and para-ecclesiastical organizations.

We have prepared these resources from our theological, pastoral, communitary and life experiences, and hope that they will help the peoples of our Great Land to know, advocate for, demand and defend their Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

May this guide be useful for informed reflection and action amidst the painful reality of many women and families who suffer in our Latin America and the Caribbean.

### Opening chant

Several chants were suggested during the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use these, otherwise find one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2).

### Group reading

MEN AND WOMEN READ THE TEXT IN “FEMALE FORM”

Our Father/Mother,

Who art in heaven, and come close to us,

In the eyes, in the embrace, the caress of each

Sister-comrade;

Hallowed be Thy Name

Capable to summon the most terrible of realities to be transformed

Thy Kingdom of:

Justice

Unity  
 Equality  
 Freedom  
 Hope  
 Opportunities for all  
 Come.  
 Thy will be done on earth  
 On this earth of ours that weeps and waits for  
 Your redemption through us,  
 So that we walk to Heaven  
 Fully convinced that our Utopia  
 Is possible from here and from now;  
 Give us this day our daily bread,  
 Yes, the one which satisfies the body  
 And gives us the strength to continue.  
 And the other, which encourages our hope  
 And gives meaning to our struggle.  
 Teach us to forgive those who trespass against us  
 And to hold firmly to the reality of your forgiveness.  
 Lead us not into the temptation  
 Of giving up in front of obstacles,  
 Of ignoring each other's efforts,  
 Of pretending to walk our own path, when it is the path of many...  
 Of losing contact with you.  
 Deliver us from evil, whatever face it might present  
 We acknowledge you as owner  
 And proprietor of the kingdom,  
 Of all the power of love  
 And all the glory of life  
 We identify as your dignified image  
 And likeness together with all  
 Human beings.  
 Amen  
*Laura Figueroa Granados*<sup>6</sup>

### **We grow stronger through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God's hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards "Right to life: no woman's life can be at risk by pregnancy or labour", using the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from the Dominican Republic.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

### **About the participants**

GROUP ACTIVITY:

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<sup>6</sup> Extraído del libro de Liturgia de la IV Asamblea General del CLAI, pag. 35. Fuente: <http://www.webselah.com/liturgia-dia-internacional-de-la-mujer>

The coordinator must look for the conditions to apply beforehand: that there are not people from the same group or city, that there are a certain number of men, a certain number of women, adults, children, someone with glasses, etc.

Then, he/she explains that in case of ship-sinking, they must form different lifeboats with the already mentioned characteristics.

Once on board, the participants must learn the names of all the persons from the shipwreck, where they were born, what group or institution they belong to, how they will name their boat. As it is a shipwreck, each person answers what they would save and what the group in general would save.

There follows the simulation of the ship sinking, with all the participants imitating the same movement and the command to take to the lifeboats. They carry out the group activity and present it to the whole group.

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite participants to make a list of ten do's and don'ts, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

## **From a specific reality we begin a dialogue with our reality**

The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.

The Regional Secretary for Río de la Plata and the CLAI Uruguay National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called a National Consultation on 22nd and 23rd June 2012 about "The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights" at the Emmanuel Centre, in the city of Boca Chica, Dominican Republic.

No life should be at risk for avoidable causes related to pregnancy and labour, for lack of service and access to quality services to deal with the complications associated to abortion. All women have the right to comprehensive and humane healthcare during their pregnancy, labour, post-natal period, access to different healthcare choices and, in every case, to a safe and assisted labour. The protection of women whose lives are at risk due to pregnancy must be guaranteed. In conclusion, it is the right not to die due to avoidable causes during pregnancy or labour.

There is a constant lack of comprehensive education in the family, school, church, etc., in the Dominican Republic. General information on Sexual and Reproductive Rights among the population is clearly and evidently, insufficient. This shows in the high rates of unwanted pregnancies and maternal and child mortality, which have increased in recent years. The State has the duty and obligation to guarantee this right to every inhabitant.

Maternal mortality as a result of pregnancy or labour can be prevented by multi-sectorial actions dealing with education, prevention and improvements in the access to healthcare as well as in the quality of healthcare.

The latest statistics show that the mortality rates in the region continue being high and they aggravate in the poorest areas. In Latin America and the Caribbean, adolescent mothers have seven times more probabilities of being poor than older mothers. The more poverty, the higher the rates of early childbearing. Extreme poverty is especially observed in childhood. "Orphan girls and boys to living mothers and fathers". Sexual abuse to adolescents is higher than in developing countries. We can say that rape on adolescents happens in their family environment (fathers, stepfathers, other relatives and family acquaintances). Intra-family violence has increased, this has shown within the community and social environment (schools and neighbourhoods),

through crime proliferation, drug consumption and sex work.

At church level, reality is experienced through prejudice and church practices which do not meet the needs and reality of the community. Prejudice within the churches is linked to theological readings of reality which are anachronistic and often respond to interests of domination and power. The health problems of women, especially related to education, abortion and Sexual and Reproductive Rights are not taken into account. There is no biblical-theological education on issues of sexuality and these issues are often forbidden in churches and ecclesiastical educational institutions.

The churches are out of the context of their social and cultural environment and the reality concerning the right of women to decide over their body and their Sexual and Reproductive Health; they have focused on the biblical context and sociocultural reality of past times.

The image of a patriarchal God is still preached in many churches, together with the worthlessness of the women in the faith communities.

However, we must admit that there is another facet of faith-based organizations. They are institutions which stand very close to the people and the community. They are highly appreciated because they support those most in need, because of their good deeds and their opportune, prophetic voices. That is why they can contribute effectively to making substantial changes, so that communities can know, defend and claim for their rights. They possess well-trained human resources and the will to achieve this.

An authentic and consistent answer from the churches must start by the training of their leadership, of their pastors and the membership. To do this, it is necessary to design regular training programmes to be offered by the churches, seminaries and universities, dealing with issues like masculinity, gender relations, Christian values, etc. Also, biblical hermeneutics courses related to Human Rights and SRR.

We must encourage group discussions among men in the church, so as to reflect on gender equality and equity, violence against women and Sexual and Reproductive Health. Promote spaces for young people, couples, women, etc., to meet, to read the Bible together contextually; prepare material on SRR for different groups and ages.

We need to design training resources, both on Sexual and Reproductive Health and pastoral (sermons and studies), which aim at strengthening the commitment and the information of leaders and parishioners in the congregations, so that they become educators and multipliers of Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

We must promote and participate in the sensitization sessions around March 8th and November 25th: Meetings of interdenominational ecclesiastical leaders to approach these issues. Also, foster the integration of Sexual and Reproductive Health issues in the programmes universities and theological seminaries. We need to organize work alliances with every sector in society involved in the work with SRR, advocate and be watchful so that the State guarantees Sexual and Reproductive Rights as they are recognized in the Dominican laws.

### **Text on what we observe in the country**

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED AT THE END:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

## Discussions with the Word from the Bible

**Text for reflection:** Lk 13:10-17 (New revised standard version)

<sup>10</sup>Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. <sup>11</sup>And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. <sup>12</sup>When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ <sup>13</sup>When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. <sup>14</sup>But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day.’ <sup>15</sup>But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? <sup>16</sup>And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?’ <sup>17</sup>When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

### From life and the Biblical text

1. What is the symbolic representation of the crippled woman?
2. What life experiences or situations make women crippled?
3. What was Jesus’ attitude?
4. In what way does this text make us reflect on “The Right to Life: no woman’s life should be put at risk or endangered by reason of pregnancy or labour”?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### Commentary

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three persons to express their views regarding it.

Throughout history, we –women- have suffered discrimination, suffering and death. Our lives have been ruled by hierarchies that have used their power to impose their own criteria over our own bodies. There is an abundance of products for women’s “intimate hygiene”. A woman is frowned upon if she does not marry and have children. Even our sexual life is submitted to the man’s wishes.

All those burdens have crippled us, turning us into servile slaves of hierarchies enshrined in the imperialist church and nation-state’s divorceless marriage. We have been forced to surrender our wills, to change our names, to name ourselves differently, to forget our land, our mothers, our grandmothers, our goddesses.

It is time to stand up and condemn this culture of death that suffocates us. Let us know our rights, support them and demand them. The text highlights the hands, which symbolise the way we must care for each other, since the only way to be free from that nameless illness is by being united. We, who take part of the churches, seminaries and other faith-based organisations must “lay” our hands on our crippled bodies as Jesus of Nazareth laid his hands on the woman in the story, healing her. Only by mutual care and sorority can we stand up straight and walk steadily, telling and singing our joy of living in dignity, respect and love.

### Tasks and commitments

WORK ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What actions can we take so that this right is fulfilled in our ecclesiastical communities, church organisations, church institutions, communities and by the authorities?
2. Try to write a list of three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Pres-

ent them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## Finishing the meeting

### Assessment

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

### Closing the liturgy

CLOSING CANTICLE

(Annexes 2)

### A call to commitment

*(Facilitator)*

We confirm that our goal here and today is to embody the vision of what God's people is called to be. We make the commitment: We will walk together as a people liberated by God's forgiveness.

*(Everybody)*

Amidst the deterioration of the world, we will bring forth the good news of reconciliation, healing and justice in Christ.

*(Facilitator)*

We will walk together as the people who have faith in the resurrection.

*(Everybody)*

Amidst exclusion and hopelessness, we will believe with joy and hope in the promise of plenitude of life.

*(Facilitator)*

We will walk together as a people in prayer.

*(Everybody)*

Amidst the confusion and loss of identity, we will discern the signs of the fulfilment of God's plan and wait for His Kingdom come.

*(Facilitator)*

Our God, help us to uphold the decisions that we have taken here.

*(Everybody)*

Amen.

*Lutheran Church El Adviento<sup>7</sup>*

### We leave, strengthened by prayer

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

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<sup>7</sup> Comisión Ecueménica de Derechos Humanos. Celebración realizada en Quito, Ecuador, el 8 de diciembre de 2002.

©Red de Liturgia y Educación Cristiana CLAI-CELADEC. Fuente: Selah: <http://www.webselah.com/celebracion-liturgica-por-los-derechos-humanos>.

## Meeting 3

# Freedom and security go hand in hand

*“The right to liberty and security of the person: no woman can be subjected to practices like genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, abortion or sterilization without her consent”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Guatemala

*“Brothers and sisters from all over Latin America and the Caribbean: to those of us, people and churches members of CLAI Guatemala, a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual country, it is a blessing to have the responsibility to organize this meeting, as part of the process leading to the CLAI VI General Assembly. We have contributed with our voice, our feelings, our hopes and, above all, our commitment to promote respect to rights, freedom and security, in the frame of Sexual and Reproductive Rights. Especially, respect to women’s dignity, who are victims of violence. It is a great blessing to be part of this process of transformation. We invite and challenge the Churches from Latin America and the Caribbean to work for the fulfillment of our rights.”*

#### Opening canticle

Several canticles to start the meetings were suggested in the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use it, otherwise find a suitable one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2)

#### “El Cielo Canta Alegría”

COLLECTIVE READING

*Read by a woman*

#### The prayer of rebellion

I come before you, Lord, with humbleness  
I want to live a life of commitment to justice.  
Not selling myself for nothing or before anyone.  
To resist the temptation of seeking the false peace

of comfort and blindness.  
Make me a nonconformist before injustice, error, hatred,  
Dissatisfied with the farce of the world,  
but with a great wish to work so as to improve it.  
Make me an indomitable of your Kingdom,  
which is a Kingdom of faith and justice,  
make me worthy of those words of Yours:  
“Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.  
But take heart:  
I have overcome the world”.  
(Unknown author)

## **We become stronger through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God’s hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality regarding “A person’s right to freedom and security: No woman can be subjected to practices such as forced mutilation, pregnancy or abortion, or sterilization without her consent” using the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from Guatemala.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God’s word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures for the commitment of the churches.

### **About the participants**

Group activity: The facilitator invites the participants to form two circles (one inside the other) with the same number of persons and asks them to stand facing each other. Some background music is recommended.

The facilitator asks them to introduce each other by shaking hands, saying their name and asking: “What do you do?”, “what do you like?” and “what don’t you like?”

The animator makes a sign for both circles go in the opposite direction, so that each person gets to stand in front of a new person.

The animator asks for them to greet with a hug and ask each other the same questions they made and answered before. Then, the circle moves again but this time the participants greet each other with their feet, next time with their elbows, shoulders, etc.

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite the participants to make a list of ten do’s and don’t’s, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

## **From a specific reality we begin a dialogue with our reality**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

This material emerged from the National Consultation which took place in Guatemala from the 26th to the 28th June, 2012, with the contributions of the Episcopal,

Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches. It also emerged from the support of the CLAI Guatemala National Board, from their team of coordinators, with the support of the national UNFPA. But first and foremost, it emerges from the data received, which is part of the reality of the country, with its experiences, testimonies, stories and voices announcing peace, freedom, love and truth in Guatemala.

*“Protection must be ensured to those women who run the risk of genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, imposed sterilization or abortion. No one must accept sexual harassment and security must be demanded to avoid any form of sexual abuse or rape. All persons have the right to refuse to take part in experiments, sterilizations and to the use of contraceptive methods in by force”.*

The violation of this and other rights is a problem which affects us all. However, education about rights is not available to all.

We are provided with education which does not enable us to be critical thinkers, but to follow the pre-established models, “we are not educated to question”.

There is a “good and favourable” legislation in Guatemala, but it is unknown, since the system does not allow information to flow, a sign of the “social-structural” sin. To the extent that the youth and children know the laws, they will be empowered and demand justice, which is not convenient to the establishment –both to political and ecclesiastical authorities.

Those who should be in charge of educating and making the SRR be fulfilled show “indifference”, so there is no space or opportunities to exchange experiences in this field. Behind this, personal and group interests, as well as economic, political and doctrinal interests can also be identified.

The differences and contradictions we observe in the field of rights are reinforced by the chauvinistic language of the dominant culture and ideology.

The critics and claims especially coming from the groups of young people are not taken into account, which places them in a vulnerable position.

These problems are not taken care of in the church. However, since the church is formed by human beings, we are also affected by these. We refuse to acknowledge and accept that there is violence, inequality, teenage pregnancy, disrespect to rights in front of our eyes.

It is happening and we do not want to admit it. It is something which happens in our own youth groups and what we do, many times, is “to exclude the young girl or boy for the sin committed”, often thinking that they “asked for it”.

Religious fanaticism, typical of some churches, prevents people from objectively seeing the roots and consequences of the lack of exercise of rights.

Church leaders, due to their conservative vision, prevent the other members to act in defence of these rights. It is not permitted to speak about these topics in the church. Those who try to do something are even excluded, for not being in accordance with the thinking that should matter in the church: caring for spirit. Frequently, acceptance and conformism are taught.

The Bible is not scrutinized in the light of context; they look for what is not there, and the contributions of science are disregarded, which has left us without knowledge. There is a lack of biblical materials in this field. The perception of God’s image, from the masculine perspective aggravates the differences and the inequality between men and women in the church. Some churches and their leaders manipulate people through fear to subjugate them and obtain economic and political gains.

Facing this social and ecclesiastical reality, we think we must “revive a more politicized church, which serves by accompanying the affected community in the educa-

tive, pastoral and legal aspects”.

In the church we must promote education and awareness of SRR of all persons, empower them to make decisions, especially regarding their body. We must revive the values of humanity: the most humane is God, the most divine, man.

The churches and organizations participating in the Guatemala National Consultation propose three specific actions:

1. To implement a course (“Diploma”) on SRH with women, from a liberating language and symbols, using multidisciplinary resources and with strategic alliances such as ONUMUJER, UNFPA.
2. A course on masculinities with leaders, pastors, priests, bishops, fathers.
3. To produce educational material about old concepts and stereotypes and how these should be now, with an inclusive and liberating language, culturally and generationally relevant (different ages, boys, girls, young people, adults) which can be used in the training of theological institutions which train ecclesiastical leaders.

### **Text on what we observe in the country**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

### **Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

**Text for reflection:** Acts of the Apostles 16:16–39 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>16</sup> One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup>While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, ‘These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.’

<sup>18</sup>She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And it came out that very hour. <sup>19</sup>But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the authorities. <sup>20</sup>When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, ‘These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews, <sup>21</sup>and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.’

<sup>22</sup>The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup>After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup>Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup>About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup>Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. <sup>27</sup>When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup>But Paul shouted in a loud voice, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.’

<sup>29</sup>The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas<sup>30</sup>. Then he brought them outside and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’<sup>31</sup> They answered, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ <sup>32</sup>They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in

his house. <sup>33</sup>At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. <sup>34</sup>He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

<sup>35</sup>When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, 'Let those men go.'  
<sup>36</sup>And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, 'The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace.'  
<sup>37</sup>But Paul replied, 'They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves.'  
<sup>38</sup>The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; <sup>39</sup>so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.

### **From life and the biblical text**

1. What triggered the anger of the slave-girl's owners?
  2. What did Paul complain about when he demanded that the magistrates should come and free them?
  3. How is the violation of that right expressed in our present day?
  4. Who hinders that right?
- Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### **Commentary**

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three people to give their views regarding it.

When we affect the interests of the powerful, we must prepare to encounter the harshest reactions. When we "heal", when we demand justice and rights, the systems reacts against the church. What kind of church are we? Are we healing and liberating our people? Are we working for and demanding their rights?

Paul's attitude is clear and explicit as he demands justice. Perhaps he could have accepted freedom without questioning, but this attitude teaches us that we should not keep silent before injustice or impunity. Paul's attitude is a demand for his dignity. We, God's children, have dignity because we were created in his image and to his likeness. To work for this right means to demand women's dignity, their right to have their freedom respected and to guarantee their security when it comes to Sexual and Reproductive Health. (This commentary can be complemented by reading annex 1-B, KJ).

### **Tasks and commitments**

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that these rights are well-known and spread in our ecclesiastical communities, church organizations, communities and authorities?
2. Try to write in a list three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

### **Finishing the meeting**

#### **Assessment**

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

## Closing the Liturgy

### CLOSING CANTICLE

(Annexes 2)

### A call to commitment

#### WOMEN'S CREED

I believe in God, creator of the world and all that exists, who created woman and man in his own image and likeness, who created the world and commanded them to take care of the Earth.

I believe in Jesus, son of God, chosen by God, born of a woman, who listened to women and appreciated them, who lived in their homes and talked to them about the Kingdom, who had women disciples who followed him and helped him with his goods.

I believe in Jesus, who talked about theology with a woman by the well and confided that he was the Messiah to her for the first time, and encouraged her to go to the city and tell the good news –the first preacher of the good news.

I believe in Jesus: over whom a woman poured perfume and anointed the anointed one by God, at Simon's house, who admonished the male guests who criticized her; who cured a woman on Saturday and brought health back to her because he was a human being.

I believe in Jesus, who compared God with a woman who was looking for a lost coin, with a woman who was sweeping, looking for her coin.

I believe in Jesus, who considered pregnancy and birth a metaphor of transformation, a new birth from angst to joy.

He who was betrayed, crucified and abandoned and died to bring life in fullness to all living beings.

I believe in the resurrected Jesus, who first appeared before the women reunited with Mary Magdalene, the first apostle and sent them to spread the astonishing message: "Go and tell..."

I believe in the universality of The Saviour, in whom there is no Jew, no Greek, no slave, no free, no man, no woman, because we are all one in Jesus Christ.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, who moves over the waters of creation and over the earth.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the sanctifying spirit of God, who summons us and congregates us and, like a hen, covers us with its wings.

*Judith Van Osdol – Hansen*<sup>8</sup>

### We leave, strengthened by prayer

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

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<sup>8</sup> Fuente: Red de Liturgia del CLAI: <http://www.clailiturgia.org/credo-de-la-mujer-48o.html>

## Meeting 4

# Human beings...all equal?

*“Right of equality and suppression of all discrimination, even in the sexual and reproductive sphere”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Uruguay

“From the Republic of Uruguay, the community who lives in the land of the painted birds, we greet you with an embrace in Christ’s love which unites us through Latin America and the Caribbean, in our pilgrimage of faith and love.

We invite you to work in ‘Right to equality and suppression of all discrimination, even in the sexual and reproductive sphere’, in the faith and hope of building a world without discrimination, more just and dignified, in accordance with the heart of God”.

#### Opening chant

Several chants were suggested during the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use these, otherwise find one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2)

#### Group reading

“All human beings are equal, but some are black and African: so, in order to go into a country of equal human beings but white ones, they must leave pieces of cloth and skin hanging on the barbed wire fence at the border.

All human beings are equal, but some are women: so their salaries are lesser than those of human beings who are equal, but men.

All human beings are equal, but some are homosexual: so they must start long legal battles to be allowed to do things that human beings who are equal (but heterosexual) do, such as extending their social welfare entitlements to their partner or adopting children.

All human beings are equal, but some are old: so it is almost impossible for them to be given a job by other human beings who are equal, but young.

All human beings are equal, but if we are men, white, young and heterosexual, we are more equal than others.

No human being has more value than another, but some have to live in aban-

doned power plants, surrounded by garbage or in neighbourhoods contaminated with lead, other human beings are boys and girls who suffer sexual abuse and others are grandmothers and grandfathers in an old people's home where no one visits them and they feel lonely.

No human being is more valuable than another, but if he or she is a Bolivian human being, their life and work has less value and they might clean rich business-people's homes in conditions of semi-slavery.

No human being is more valuable than another, but if he or she is a transsexual, they will hardly find a dignified job.

No human being is more valuable than another, but to be a man, white, young, heterosexual and in a good financial situation is priceless.

Who knows why –for what mysterious difference- that is the human being who has chosen himself as the centre of the universe, the normal human being, the referent, the one who makes laws for his equals, the one who governs for the ones like him, the one who operates in the markets, and decides whether to give or not to give to the others, the ones who are not men, or white, or heterosexual, or in a good financial position but, precisely, “the others”, a permission to be a bit more equal.

All human beings are equal, but we disguise it very well. No human being is more valuable than another but how difficult it is to understand it! All human beings have equal right to be human beings.

Someday, there won't be enough armies to persuade those who are not equal to stop trying to be equal. Then we will understand how convenient it would have been to not make so many differences.”<sup>9</sup>

## **We become stronger through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God's hands.

## **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards “Right of equality and suppression of all discrimination, even in the sexual and reproductive spheres”, using the materials prepared by a group of work of brothers and sisters from Uruguay.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries. .
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

## **About the participants**

Group activity: The group sits in a circle. The first person introduces himself/herself by saying: “Mi name is ... and I like...”. Each person says one action they like to do (jumping, laughing, sleeping, etc) miming it at the same time. Then, the participant sitting on her/his right will repeat the name and action of the first person and introduce himself/herself in the same way.

The group continues with all the names beginning by the first person.

## **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite participants to make a list of ten do's and don't's, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

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<sup>9</sup> Adaptación a la realidad uruguaya de un poema de Mex Urtizberea.

## **From a specific reality we begin a dialogue with our reality**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Regional Secretary for Río de la Plata and the CLAI Uruguay National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called a National Consultation on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2012 about “The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights” at the Emmanuel Centre, in the city of Colonia Valdense.

*The law includes the protection against all forms of violence caused by discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, sexual orientation or any other status. At a global level, in the majority of the countries, discrimination is regarded as a form of violence. We need to analyse how these are expressed in our environment, confront them and report them.*

Uruguay has, in general, a good coverage of educational and health services. Educational centres are mixed. Access to education makes it possible for everyone to have a wide range of professional choices. Although America is the continent which shows greater imbalances between wealth and poverty, Uruguay begins to be an exception.

Act 18.426 (Right to Sexual and Reproductive Health) states that appropriate services such as medical supplies, professional care, friendly and reliable counselling, etc, are obligatory in every health centre, which allows access to Sexual and Reproductive Health services to all persons. Furthermore, other important laws have been passed in favour of building a full citizenship, such as the Breast Feeding Act, paternity and maternity Acts and laws protecting against sexual harassment and abuse as well as against discrimination.

However, the topic of discrimination and social exclusion has much to do with issues of power and economy. We observe that there is discrimination and stigmatization in our society, based on sexual orientation, race, for being a woman, for being an HIV carrier, for chemical dependency.

There has been a cultural breakthrough in the subject of gender violence, but sensitization does not reach all levels, since there are limitations on access to information and services. In addition, the progress towards sensitization to discrimination is also limited by the chauvinistic culture.

The power of religions has historically given shape to cultures and affects people's lives –either positively or negatively. That is why, our struggle is against centuries of taboos and conflicts (discrimination).

One of the ways in which the church has reacted has been silence and through its silence, it has been an accomplice of many ways of death in society. There are still thoughts and points of view in the church that reinforce discrimination and which we have not, unfortunately, managed to recognise yet.

Many churches have made significant reflections and contributions on these subjects, but often there has not been enough strength to sustain and maintain them.

The work of the churches is seldom noticed or acknowledged by the State, so it is necessary for us, as Churches, to start acting so that the State will realize that the Church is a part of society. We need strength to engage in dialogue with the State. We must make the voice of the Church heard.

The most controversial topics related to discrimination within our communities are those related to sexual diversity. We must admit that the biggest limitations we have when facing these issues are prejudice and ignorance. When some opinions are as if “said by God”, rigid and difficult to change, we do not realize that the gospel is

liberating and its intention is to lead us to an abundant life. “Church cannot look the other way” in situations of conflict or confrontation, such as gender and sexuality issues.

“The church is not a safe place for homosexual and transsexual persons”. “Very often in churches, the woman’s body is regarded as something to be controlled.”

The biggest limitation is the lack of spaces for discussion and education about these issues at every level. However, despite these limitations, we perceive an interest in generating processes to discuss these topics in the churches, although there is a fear that this might cause divisions.

Essentially, we need to create a point of view which recognizes the dignity of every person as a son or daughter of God, a point of view against discrimination. We need to establish a process of re-reading of the biblical texts and the various traditions. It is necessary to realise the impact they have on each person’s life and how they are used to justify situations of oppression or death; or rather we make good news of them and receive hope and liberation. We must seek the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in our ecclesiastical community and decide (as the Christian community did regarding the inclusion of the gentiles –Acts of the Apostles 15) “how to be an inclusive community”.

### **Reading about what we observe in the country**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

### **Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

**Text for reflection:** Genesis 1:26-27 (New Revised Standard Version)

26 Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ 27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

#### **Galatians 3:28-29**

<sup>28</sup> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

#### **From life and the biblical text**

1. According to the text from the Genesis, are there any human beings who have not been created in the image and according to the likeness of God?
2. Are not men or women the persons with a different sexual orientation from heterosexual?
3. What forms of discrimination are allowed in the Bible?

4. What differences are there between our point of view and that of Jesus' as expressed through Paul in Galatians?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### **Commentary**

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three persons to express their views regarding it.

All human beings are created in the image of God and to his likeness. There are no human beings who have not been created by God. All human face reveals and invokes his image. In this sense, the apostle Saint Paul contributes to the richness of this concept when he states that, by the grace of God in Christ, all persons have the same value, independently of our characteristics, conditions, differences, abilities or contexts. Therefore, this vision summons us to relate to our neighbour from the perspective of Jesus. (This comment can be extended by reading Annex 1- G, H)

### **Tasks and commitments**

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that these rights are well-known and spread in our ecclesial communities, church organizations, communities and authorities?
2. Try to write in a list three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## **Finishing the meeting**

### **Assessment**

Ask the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

### **Closing the Liturgy**

CLOSING CANTICLE

(Annexes 2)

### **A call to commitment**

FRANCISCAN BLESSING (ADAPTATION)

May God bless you with discomfort

About that which is easy and the half-truths,

About all that is superficial

So that you may be able to change

a bit more and be "less light",

a bit more and be "less dark".

May God bless you with anger to not be silent

In the face of injustice, oppression and evilness,

So that you may work

For more justice, freedom and peace.

And may God bless you and give you a good life.

May God bless you with tears to shed

For those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, war and loneliness.

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into something better.

May God bless you with foolishness

to be able to believe that you can make a difference  
in this world that is upside-down.

**We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment,  
for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 5

# Privacy means respect and dignity

*“Right to privacy: all sexual and reproductive health services must be confidential”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Bolivia

*We are here and now! We have brought our memories, carved in our bodies sculpted by time, of efforts made in every cycle of life. From sun to sun, from night to night, from drop to drop, from seed to seed, from tear to tear, from sweat to sweat, always keeping our dignity.*

*Filigrees of diverse life are woven there, on our bodies; recreated with solidarity and compassionate gestures which open up towards a “community of equals”, as a testimony of unity in the body of Christ in the world.*

*We are called to consolidate a new time; and if it were necessary, we would dig in the hard soil of indifference and grow even the impossible there, so as to plant new seeds of hope for the future generations.*

*May indignation open our eyes towards a reality which suffers and clamours for justice!*

*These historical times demand an effort from us, to work together on alternatives and proclaim the “good news” of resistance and hope. To restore balance and harmony is to go back to our roots, in the depths of the fountain of life.*

#### Opening canticle

Several canticles to start the meetings were suggested in the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use it, otherwise find a suitable one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2)

#### Collective reading

(M: Man – W: Woman)

#### Creed

M: We believe in God, creator and sustainer of life,  
Wisdom, mystery and infinite grace  
Creator of Heavens and earth;  
Creator of the peoples and cultures

- Creator of languages and the diversity of people.
- W: We believe in Jesus Christ, his son,  
 God made flesh in a human being for all human beings,  
 God made flesh in a culture for all cultures,  
 God made flesh in love and grace for all creation.
- M: We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
 For whom God incarnated in Jesus Christ  
 He is present in our people and our culture  
 For whom God, creator of all that exists  
 Gives us the power to be new creatures;  
 Whom, with his infinite gifts makes only one people out of all of us;  
 the body of Jesus Christ.
- W: We believe in the Church,  
 Which is universal because it is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom,  
 Which is more faithful as it wears more colours;  
 Where all colours paint one same landscape  
 Where all languages sing one same praise.
- M: We believe in the coming kingdom, the day of the great celebration  
 When all the colours of creation will unite in a rainbow of harmony,  
 When all the peoples of the earth will unite in a banquet of joy;  
 When all the languages of the universe will unite in a choir of praise.
- W: And, because we believe, we commit,  
 To believe for those who do not believe,  
 To love for those who do not love,  
 To dream for those who do not dream  
 Until what we are waiting for becomes true. Amen.

### **We grow strong through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God's hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards "Right to privacy: all the Sexual and Reproductive services must be confidential", using the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from Bolivia.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

### **About the participants**

Group activity: The group stands in a circle, each person must say their name, but he/she must also say an adjective and the name of an animal, all of these in the same sentence.

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite participants to make a list of ten do's and don'ts, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

### **From a specific reality we begin a dialogue with our reality**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are*

*read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Andino Regional Secretary and the CLAI Bolivia National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called a National Consultation on 27th and 28th August 2012 about “The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights”, in the city of La Paz.

*This right protects the person’s private life and that of his or her family. Intimacy means the space of the person’s body and mind, which nobody has the right to access without his or her consent. All of us have the right to decide who can or cannot enter our space of intimacy. This must be fulfilled by the health services, taking into consideration the respect to each people’s culture and values – otherwise, women would not use the health services, with the consequent harm to themselves. The health services staff must respect confidentiality, especially that of adolescents and women who show signs of possible abortion. The media must respect the right of all persons with HIV to keep their identity and status confidential. The media must not publish information about girls, boys or women who have been victims of rape, incest or mistreatment.*

It is clear that information about Sexual and Reproductive Rights is scarcely spread and given out to the population, which is the responsibility of governmental authorities and other institutions working in these areas. There are various limitations and a lack of will on the part of health authorities to apply and implement the norms, decrees and policies related to SRR. Since there is no good information, there is little interest and motivation to know one’s duties and rights. This is evident at a personal scale and in some social sectors as well.

Only a few years ago, Bolivian families hardly ever discussed SRR, it was part of the taboo related to sexuality. The father and the mother do not find the words to explain sexuality in the family because they think their children are still little boys or girls. There is little communication and dialogue between parents and children and this, naturally, affects the knowledge of the SRR.

There is a poor implementation of sex education in curricular programs at schools, as well as in the Bolivian society in general.

We observe a lack of well-trained and specialized human resources in the field of sexuality and SRR, as well as educational and didactic materials, which would facilitate the pedagogical processes.

There is little offer or promotion of quality training courses, workshops and seminars at a national level.

The understanding and exercise of SRR are affected, unfortunately, by cultural aspects, mixed with myths, beliefs, customs, etc.

The patriarchal and chauvinistic system also has an impact on the attitudes towards health services and towards a biased point of view of sexual diversity.

The quality of health services in Public Health Centres and Hospitals is poor. Most gynaecologists and doctors are men and women are reluctant or even afraid of being assisted by a man and prefer not to use State services. People prefer to attend other informal spaces or other popular and domestic means.

Concerning the cultural-human aspect, a lack of self-esteem prevents us from seeing our female and manly bodies with more integrity.

Most of the training –whenever there is such- is theoretical and superficial, offering just information and not getting to the root of the problem, achieving only partial results. As an example, 92 % of the people know the modern contraceptive

methods but only less than 25 % use them.

Using this sample of the complex reality we find in Bolivia concerning SRR, the role of the church may be fundamental to modify this reality.

Sadly, many churches are a reflection of what happens in society, thus replicating the same experiences.

Churches have the capability and resources to train and educate the community regarding these topics. Churches can establish ministries which fight against generational and gender-based violence. They can also exert social control in order to diminish the lack of confidentiality and the lack of respect towards culture and public services related to Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

The doors of the churches must be fully open to receive people who need counseling from the educational, pastoral and legal points of view; so they must count on staff and teams must be arranged for them to give advice and help people in need, listening attentively to their worries.

There are organized women's groups in the churches and these may often be the only safe and reliable spaces where women can open up and talk, so these spaces must be supported and strengthened, nurturing them with tools, supporting them with personal and material resources, so that they multiply and have an impact in the life of women and society.

This is comparable to recreating the experience of how God has treated us, how we have found serenity and comfort, so other people must also have the same opportunity.

The church must be at the service of the marginalised and discriminated, i.e. the church must receive and accompany the persons who suffer from HIV and AIDS, women who are victims of violence, etc.

We must respect and recognise that confidentiality and privacy is a right that all persons have, especially when these are not taken into account and applied. To educate the community about the obligations of the State as regards informing, educating, providing services and guaranteeing confidentiality is an important duty we must carry out.

We must work on the promotion and fulfilment of the Patients/Users' Charter of General Rights:

1. To receive adequate medical care.
2. To be treated with dignity and respect.
3. To receive sufficient, clear, relevant and truthful information.
4. To decide freely on their treatment.
5. To give or refuse their informed consent.
6. To keep confidentiality.
7. To be able to get a second opinion.
8. To receive medical care in case of emergency.
9. To have medical records.
10. To be assisted when they are not satisfied with the medical care they have received.

### **Reading about what we observe in the country**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

## Discussions with the Word from the Bible

**Text for reflection:** Mark 10: 47–52

<sup>47</sup>When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say: ‘Jesús, son of David, have mercy on me!’ <sup>48</sup>Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ <sup>49</sup>Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ <sup>50</sup>So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup>Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ <sup>52</sup>Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

### From life and the biblical text

1. In what way does the issue of the right to privacy reflect in the text?
2. Did Jesus know that this man was blind? Why does he ask him: What do you want me to do for you?
3. Did they blind man know who Jesus was? Why did the blind man insist so much in taking advantage of Jesus’ presence in that place?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### Commentary

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three persons to express their views regarding it.

The right to privacy is based on the respect to intimacy that every human being has, and in recognising the dignity and value of our neighbour. When we respect and feel respected, we are creating spaces of trust and confidentiality, so we feel free to attend and use health services.

The text shows Jesus’ respectful attitude in a very clear way. The moment when Jesus asks a question to “Bartimaeus, the person”, he dignifies him, he respects him, he values him. This testimony of a God who is close, who listens, who knocks on your door and waits patiently for the moment of a new rebirth is very important. “He” asks if you want, “...may it be done according to your faith”.

Confidentiality is built through spaces of trust, a conversion towards new perspectives of changing the reality we live in. If we consider people’s culture, context and rhythm with respect and dignity, this will help us to experience a “conversion” in both, the one who seeks and the one who receives, transforming us for a full and abundant life. There will be no barriers such as shame or guilt, or being sick, or dying, because knowledge and a full life is a right for all. (The commentary can be expanded by reading the text of the annex 1-I).

### Tasks and commitments

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that this right is fulfilled in our ecclesiastical communities, church organisations, church institutions, communities and by the authorities?
2. Try to write a list of three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## Finishing the meeting

### Assessment

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

## **Closing the liturgy**

CLOSING CANTICLE

Annexes 2

### **A call to commitment**

GROUP READING

We are here and now, witnesses of our time, carrying love and faith in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions so that we can fertilize the desert and knead the stones, were that necessary, because we are called to build paradise to reconnect with our humanity.

God, You are closer to us than our skin, beating in the very life of each living being;

We are multitudes longing for justice in our bodies, our sacred living temples; You generate and regenerate life in dignity, once and again, be it from forgetfulness, from ingratitude, from the outskirts of our societies and institutions.

May the soft and delicate breeze of the Holy Spirit fill us up with freshness and generosity, cleanse us from our prejudice, traditionalisms and purificatory exacerbations.

You say that Your love is enough for us, and that your power lies in fragility, in tender care; only this will save us from the fatalities created by the powerful.

Your love will prevail, here and now and forever!

### **We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 6

# Free to think freely

*“The right to freedom of thought: concerning issues of sexuality and reproduction”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Argentina

*“Che”\*, how are you?*

*From Argentina, in the south of the continent, sharing a “mate”\*, we greet all our brothers and sisters from Latin America and the Caribbean. After reflecting upon our Consultation about the “Right to freedom of thought regarding issues of sexuality and reproduction”, we feel challenged to work on this issue together and full of hope, as the tango says:*

*Hope is a map which draws*

*Our people in the search for other routes*

*Hope is a long walk,*

*The dream of a liberated land, axe and spade of love .*

*Come on! Joy is emerging*

*Come on! He is walking with us*

*One which brings forth the dawn.<sup>10</sup>*

\*“Che” is a local expression and “mate” is a traditional South American infusion/drink

### Opening canticle

Several canticles to start the meetings were suggested in the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use it, otherwise find a suitable one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2)

### Collective reading

PREPARE OUR HANDS

God of life, prepare our hands  
for a new and different touch,  
prepare our hands for a touch  
that elicits union,

---

<sup>10</sup> Guido Bello y Pablo Sosa, pastores metodistas.

an awakening,  
a hope,  
a feeling.  
Many are the old, worn-out gestures,  
the movements which are staid by now...  
Many are the old and futile excuses  
made so as to repeat behaviours.  
Give us audacity to create  
new bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood,  
new ties of affection,  
to break the old patterns of relating,  
encouraging true and meaningful  
spaces and movements towards closeness.  
*Ernesto Barros Cardoso*

### **We grow strong through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God's hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards "Right to freedom of thought: concerning issues of sexuality and reproduction", using the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from Argentina.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

### **About the participants**

Group activity: All the participants stand in a circle. The coordinator explains that they will sing a rap, for which they must clap to the rhythm on their legs... Then, the facilitator teaches them the song, which goes: "This rap I'm singing now will say my name out loud, Patty, Patty, my name is Patty".

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite participants to make a list of ten do's and don't's, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

### **From a specific reality to begin a dialogue with our reality**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Regional Secretary for Río de la Plata and the CLAI Argentina National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called a National Consultation on 23rd and 24th June 2012 about "The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights" at the ISEDET, in the city of Buenos Aires.

*All the persons have the right to express our feelings, ideas and thoughts concerning sexual and reproductive health as well as other related issues. This entails the duty of respecting the way in which other people express their thoughts concerning their*

*sexual and reproductive rights. We have the right to be free from restrictive interpretation of religious texts, beliefs, philosophies and customs as tools used to limit the freedom of thought as regards Sexual and Reproductive Health.*

In Argentina, topics related to “right to freedom of thought concerning issues of sexuality and reproduction” revolve mostly around decriminalization of abortion and sexual diversity. These are issues on which the majority of the churches have not stated a position, although many people wonder whether the churches should state a position on them.

It is difficult to reflect upon these issues within the church for fear of modifying what has been historically received, what is known, so we express this in a culture of silence. We prefer to say nothing about them.

We can see a lack of information concerning Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the church, which translates into a lack of tolerance towards different opinions and choices, which is, in turn, the cause of prejudice and harm towards human beings that are “different”.

Generally speaking, there is not a feeling of freedom regarding these issues; thought is pigeonholed into preconceived judgements arising from lack of information and reflection. These issues are not in the agendas of the churches and they are often addressed only when a situation related to them arises.

These matters are not discussed in the communities because they might become an element of disagreement, arguments, problems and even divisions, all of which are always avoided in the churches from the standpoint that churches must always be spaces for consensus.

We still have to address and face a new interpretation of the Bible, particularly regarding the body as part of God’s creation.

We fail when we do not spread the information related to SRR issues in the churches for fear of different opinions.

Freedom of thought must go hand in hand with real and reliable information. Therefore, it is necessary to count on professional support, so as to have elements to facilitate discernment in the community. Hence, we must encourage spaces of dialogue in the churches, especially for adolescents and young people.

It is necessary to stimulate the production of our own materials regarding these issues related to attitudes in the sexual and reproductive arena, bearing in mind the different social realities and cultural contexts, as well as diversity of thought and sexual diversity.

Christians are not outside the community, we are a part of it, so we must be part of the peoples’ citizen-building. We must participate in the conversations of the community, in search for freedom and well-being at all levels.

From the life and tasks of the churches, we must go deeper on the biblical reflection and discussions with the culture, from a liberating perspective. We must train our pastors and pastoral agents in these issues and, through them, sensitise communities.

On the other hand, it is necessary to foster educational processes beyond the academic realms, by organizing open activities for the community, creating spaces where people can come together and find training and information based on biblical stories.

We must come up with proposals for educational workshops for Sunday Schools. We see the need to organise –together with other entities such as the Argentine Federation of Evangelical Churches (FAIE); the Superior Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies (ISEDET) and the United Council of Christian Education (CUEC) – projects which facilitate and guarantee sustainability in public advocacy for the exercise of rights.

It is vital to encourage dialogues with governmental entities and civil society organisations, which permit concrete, collaborative actions regarding these issues. This must also be coordinated with civil society organisations which offer openness and support for the work with SRR. Another important aspect is to receive knowledge and training regarding current laws about sexuality and reproductive health.

Also, to create a resource database available in each country, especially regarding the legal aspects.

Coordination, from CLAI, with an Executive Board of Ecumenical Organisations where dialogue is promoted, among other things, to reflect on the biblical-theological support to provide a frame of feasibility to the diaconal work: Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights (MEDH); United Board of Missions (JUM); Ecumenical Service of Support and Orientation to Migrants and Refugees (CAREF); lobbying work as methodology.

### **Reading about what we observe in the country**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

### **Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

**Text for reflection:** Galatians 5:1 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>1</sup>For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

#### **From life and the biblical text**

1. In what way does the text reflect the topic of the right to freedom of thought?
2. Are there any thoughts which enslave us?
3. How is the violation to this right expressed nowadays? Who hinders that right?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

#### **Commentary**

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three people to give their opinions regarding it.

The right we have worked on discusses freedom of thought. Can anyone really limit my freedom of thought? Firstly, we would say no; that they can limit my actions but I can continue having my own thoughts. However, my very thought is even influenced and moulded by my environment, my society, my education, my family, my time, etc.

In this way, I think I know what is nice or ugly, what is the ideal shape of the body, the face and so many other things which vary according to the different times and cultures. That way is how we have even arrived here, with our mental models about sexuality.

If Christ really made us free, what mental models are we going to question concerning sexuality?

Where did we start from? What forms, models, ideas have we got here with? Which, if any, are worthy of the freedom with which Christ has made us free? How shall we find a measurement to question those models?

If God in Jesus Christ came to give us life and abundant life, we can begin by questioning the mental models which limit our lives or our neighbours' lives, preventing them from being abundant. Let's allow ourselves to not submit again to the yoke of slavery, but to remain in the same freedom in which Christ made us free.

(The commentary may be expanded by reading annex 1-B, J)

### **Tasks and commitments**

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that these rights are well-known and spread in our ecclesiastical communities, church organizations, communities and authorities?
2. Try to write in a list three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## **Finishing the meeting**

### **Assessment**

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

### **Closing the Liturgy**

CLOSING CANTICLE

(Annexes 2)

### **A call to commitment**

PRAYER TO CLOSE THE MEETING

Lord, Eternal God, on closing the meeting we would like to devote everything we have done to you,

To offer everything we have said and submit everything we have thought to you.

Today, we heard your voice challenging us.

We feel that we lack the strength to accept your invitation and leave everything to follow you

wherever you are.

We find it hard to seek, first of all, your justice.

It is difficult for us to put your word into practice and understand, once and for all, that people are more important than possessions, ideas, traditions, moral, privileges.

But we admit, humbly, that none of that can save us.

Look at us with the same look of love which you cast upon the rich young man in the gospel and give us the grace and strength to make the best decision.

We want to search your kingdom and your justice first of all.

To love you more than all we have, and to love, equally, all people who surround us more than our selfish ideas and privileges.

Bring about the word of your grace in us.

In that way, we will sleep at peace with the knowledge that while we rest you are providing for our support.

Tomorrow you will dress us like you dress the lilies of the field and you will feed us like you feed the birds in the sky.

And from now on, we thank you. For Jesus Christ, our only Lord.

Amen. 11

### **We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 7

# Only by knowing the truth can we become free

*“The right to information and education: including access to a full education about the benefits, risks and effectiveness of family planning”.*

### Opening and presentation

#### Greeting and invitation from Paraguay

*From the heart of America, land of the blazing sun and refreshing tereré, of the polka and guaranía\*, the fertile land and the semiarid Chaco, we greet our brothers and sisters of Latin America and the Caribbean, which we would summarize as follows in our sweet Guaraní language:*

*Ore maitéi ha ore añua opavavépe guará.*

*(Our greetings and hugs to each and every one of you).*

*From our realities, perceptions and reflections we invite you to exchange proposals and share ideas, about the right we have worked on, hoping that the seeds and fruit are pleasing to God and His people.*

*\*tereré, polka, guaranía: a typical drink, dance and music*

#### Opening chant

Several chants were suggested during the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use these, otherwise find one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2).

#### Collective reading

Have you realized how big the love of God is?

Have you realized that he is always ready to restore our lives?

Have you realized that, with God, there is always an opportunity to start again?

Today, God gives us the opportunity to start again,

to improve ourselves, to look up and continue walking with courage and hope.

Today God invites us to live a new life,

A life in which we are challenged to take a stand every day for life, for love, for freedom and for unity.

### **We become stronger through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to pray, putting the meeting in God's hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of the meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards "The right to information and education: including access to a full education about the benefits, risks and effectiveness of family planning" using the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from Mexico.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

### **About the participants**

Group activity: The facilitator explains that they will attend a party and everybody must contribute with something, but the word (describing what they bring) must begin by the first letter of the person's name. The first person says his/her name and what they will bring. The second repeats what the first person said and adds his/her own name.

For instance:

1. "I am Marcel and I'm bringing some music."
2. "He is Marcel and he's bringing the music. I am Sandra and I am bringing sandwiches."
3. "He is Marcel and he's bringing some music. She is Sandra and she is bringing sandwiches. I am Caroline and I am bringing a cake. One by one, all the participants introduce themselves.

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite participants to make a list of ten do's and don't's, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

## **From a specific reality we begin a dialogue with our reality**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Regional Secretary for Río de la Plata and the CLAI Paraguay National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called a National Consultation on 21st and 22nd July 2012 about "The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights" at the Committee of Churches for Emergency Aid (CIPAE), in the city of Asunción.

*It is an unavoidable obligation of the State, the family and society at large, to provide integral education and clear, relevant and scientific information about sexuality, as well as correct information that is gender-sensitive and free from stereotypes on reproduction and rights. This right also concerns relevant information about the benefits, risks and effectiveness of all methods of fertility regulation.*

Paraguay has no laws regarding sex education, information or dissemination on sex education or SRR. Without correct, relevant and scientific education, it is not possible to change the negative scenario which affects sexual and reproductive health. This is evident in the limited access to information concerning sexual and reproductive health. This also depends greatly on the political decisions taken by the current authorities.

However, the church and the population at large are aware that it is a pending issue to address and discuss.

Issues related to sexuality are addressed in some educational institutions, but only in terms of prevention; sexuality is not addressed in an integral way.

Sexuality is a topic avoided in many sectors of society, but there are smaller sectors which work and take a stand on the matter.

At the level of church leadership, we notice a lack of training and education. There is fear to deal with topics related to SRR for lack of knowledge and by an interpretation of sexuality that has traditionally been related to sin. This has made the churches avoid debates or take sides, or worse, to act proactively (sic). Churches have often acted as a barrier preventing debates, decision-making and actions facing the consequences of sex education issues. One way or another, the church is responsible, together with other sectors, of the deficiencies of our society.

Some sectors in the church have started working on SRR; however, the process is very slow, which neither suits the needs nor gives a solution to the problems related to the lack of SRR.

More than ever, the church needs to take action on this matter, since we have been part of the problem and today we must be part of its solution.

We need to provide spaces for reflection, discussion and sensitization within the leadership and members of the churches, motivating the clergy and governing boards to get involved in these processes.

We cannot deny any more that there is violence against women and teenage pregnancy in our churches. We cannot continue watching the lack of health services, education, laws or existing laws which are unfulfilled, high mortality rates, high teenage pregnancy rates, sexual violence, etc.

An important role that the church may play, through its prophetic voice, is to report and demand commitment from the State, with better communication and information about the policies and resources available concerning sexual and reproductive rights. To demand that such sexual and reproductive health services and resources are provided. We must demand information, awareness and prevention campaigns related to SRR from the State.

It is necessary to arrange institutional task forces and alliances with institutions dealing with these issues, so as to know and make use of the existing materials and human resources.

Also, to promote discussion forums about the right of education and information on SRR, in coordination with NGOs, educational, services and governmental institutions.

To disseminate information about sexual and reproductive rights in the media and the churches.

Since our people are multicultural and multilingual, we must work in the production of bilingual material. (Guaraní-Spanish)

To promote spaces, in the churches and pastoral training seminaries, for critical reading of the information in the media on a biblical basis. To produce Biblical materials and studies which back up these topics. It is necessary to work regularly and continuously with young married couples, so that they multiply the knowledge and training within their families. Spaces such as the ones CLAI provides contribute to the development of these topics.

## Reading about what we observe in the country

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

## Discussions with the Word from the Bible

**Text for reflection:** Hosea 4:6. John 10:10 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>6</sup>My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

<sup>10</sup>“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”.

### From life and the biblical text

1. In what way does Hosea’s text reflect the right to education and information?
2. What is the relationship between the abundant life that Jesus wants for humanity and education and information?
3. What role did Jesus play as an “educator”?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### Commentary

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three people to give their opinions about it.

God created us with the capacity to think, learn, take decisions and act; we are intelligent beings, created in God’s image, according to the text in Genesis 1:27.

Knowledge is the fact or data acquired by a person through experience or education, or theoretical or practical understanding of a subject or an object from reality. It is the awareness or familiarity acquired by the experience of a fact or a situation. Knowledge includes the “know what”, “know how” and “know where”. To know is to enlighten, to clarify and to elucidate. To count on knowledge makes us stand in a position of either acting or remaining quiet; to know gives us the possibility of demanding, pushes us to walk, to take specific action according to a particular need, in this case, women’s health. Knowledge makes postponed needs and hidden truths visible. Knowledge enlightens, brings forth light. God’s word states that we die, we suffer, we are deprived from enjoying an abundant life, the life that God offers to us if we do not count on the necessary information and knowledge. (The commentary can be expanded by reading annex 1-E).

### Tasks and commitments

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that these rights are well-known and spread in our ecclesiastical communities, church organizations, communities and authorities?
2. Try to write in a list three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## **Finishing the meeting**

### **Assessment**

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

### **Closing the Liturgy**

CLOSING CANTICLE

(Annexes 2)

### **A call to commitment**

COLLECTIVE READING

### **New days are coming**

May the God of creation,  
Lord of mountains and lakes,  
of plains and seas,  
Father and Mother of all that lives,  
who calls us today to the gathering and the feast,  
move us to service  
and guide us in the mission.  
May the God of the abundant Life,  
who loves us and forgives us,  
who heals us and reconciles,  
support us in the ministry  
of justice and peace.  
May God's breath,  
generous and caring,  
drive us and inspire us  
to go in the world  
with faith and hope,  
because new days are coming...

### **We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 8

# To marry, or not to marry? That is the right

*“The right to choose whether or not to marry and to found and plan a family: no woman can be obliged to marry against her will”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Nicaragua

*“The participating churches and organisations in the Consultation which took place in Nicaragua greet our brothers and sisters of Latin America and the Caribbean and invite them to reflect and work on the Right to choose whether or not to marry and to found and plan a family. No person can be obliged to marry against her/his will.*

*We would like to present this challenge through the words of the Prophet Isaiah 6.8: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I, send me!’”*

*That is the question each and every one of us asks ourselves and must answer. This text must remind us, in our daily life, the role we must play when the Lord calls us to fulfil his will. Our mission is to promote abundant life and we must respond with the same words as the Prophet.*

*This is our message: to undertake and fulfil the commitment we have been given, concerning the promotion and defence of the fulfilment of Sexual and Reproductive Rights in our Latin America and the Caribbean and the whole of humanity.*

#### Opening canticle

Several canticles to start the meetings were suggested in the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use it, otherwise find a suitable one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2)

#### Individual reading

One person reads the following quotes about freedom by Richard Bach:

The river delights to lift us free, if only we dare let go.

Our true work is this voyage, this adventure.

The dream awake is the same: your will to be free of all things that tie you back –

routine, authority, boredom, gravity.

What you haven't realized is that you're already free, and you always have been. If you love someone and know that he/she is ready to learn and grow, you set them free.

In order to live free and happily you must sacrifice boredom, but it is not always an easy sacrifice.

No one can stop us from doing what we want.

The only true law is that which leads to freedom.

If you want freedom and joy so much, can't you see it's not anywhere outside of you? Say you have it, and you have it! Act as if it's yours, and it is!

The reason for problems is to overcome them. The reason for freedom is to prove it. By sunrise there were nearly a thousand birds listening, trying to understand Jonathan Seagull. He spoke of very simple things – that it is right for a gull to fly, that freedom is the very nature of their being, that whatever stands against that freedom must be set aside.

It is not the challenge that faces us, that determines who we are and what we are becoming, but the way we meet the challenge, whether we toss a match at the wreck or work our way through it, step by step, to freedom.

### **We grow stronger by praying**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God's hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards the right to choose whether or not to marry and to found and plan a family. For this meeting, we will consider the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from Nicaragua
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

### **About the participants**

Group activity: The facilitator hands in a ball and invites the participants to sit in a circle, explaining the way to do the activity. While a song is being sung, the ball goes around from hand to hand; when the facilitator makes a sign, the activity stops. The person who happens to have the ball in their hands must introduce himself/herself to the group by saying his or her name and what they like to do in their free time. The activity goes on in that way until all the participants have introduced themselves. If one person ends up more than once with the ball in their hands, the group have the right to ask a question to them.

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite the participants to make a list of ten do's and don'ts, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

### **From a specific reality we dialogue with our reality**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Central America Regional Secretary and the CLAI Nicaragua National Board, with the support of UNFPA Nicaragua, called a National Consultation on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012 about “The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights”, in Managua.

*No one can force an adolescent or an adult person to marry someone they do not want to marry. Every marriage or cohabitation must be consummated with the full, free and informed consent of the contracting parties. No woman is obliged to remain married or cohabit with somebody she is not happy with, or if suffering mistreatment and violence.*

Nicaraguan society undergoes the consequences of this and other unfulfilled rights in an intense and painful way. The unfulfillment of this right is directly related to teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence.

Nicaragua is the country with the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Latin America and the Caribbean and it is in the second place in the world with this problem. Adolescents constantly suffer from 20 to 25% of maternal mortality rates (MMR). 20% of births are to adolescent mothers. The percentage of adolescents, between 15 and 19 years old, who have been pregnant is higher in rural areas (32.4%) compared to urban areas (20.8%). The most frequent aggressions against women are: domestic and sexual violence. The use of Modern Family Planning Methods (FP) is less in adolescents than in the national average.

Ideally, marriage is a right which belongs to us all and it must be the fruit of a choice made under mature, conscious and independent consent of the parties. Marriage or cohabitation is a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life.

The reality is that many people get to marriage without the smallest possibility to exert their right to choose. When this happens, marriage becomes a link to violence against women and family. This translates as the use of force and imposition of obligations as a way to reflect masculine supremacy towards the female gender. It is also manifested as lack of consent to sex or women's rape, only for the selfish satisfaction of one of the partners –preferably, men's.

The impact of this on women is very serious and painful, such as: lack of self determination, running away and leaving their home, depression, frustration, desperation, distress, submission through fear, silent endurance, isolation and dependence, dropping out of school. High vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and forced and unsafe abortions.

Although the existing laws in Nicaragua ideally consider protection and support of women, they are hardly fulfilled.

The question which arises is: What role are the churches playing in the perpetuation of violence as well as in putting an end to it?

We share this testimony, which saddens us and invites us to reflect.

*“Sister Hazel had separated from her husband on the grounds of violence; her pastor obliged her to accept her husband again in their home. This happened in one of the poor neighbourhoods of Managua. When her husband returned, he almost killed her out of jealousy. One day, when sister Hazel was at home, her husband arrived and furiously complained, beat her up and he made a slit in her throat. She begged for him to help her and he refused. After some hours he tried to touch the wound and open it but he couldn't. The husband ran for help for himself because he had apparently hurt himself too. One of his aunts found sister Hazel, who was taken to hospital and stayed in a coma for eight days.*

The story is eloquent enough. The question is: What must the role of the church be?

We are called to a new conversion, facing these realities which seem to become normal in our communities. In order to do this, we need the leadership in our churches to be moved and sensitized, so as to find ways to change these realities.

Education and training are basic tools for change. That is why we suggest creating educational proposals to be taught at all levels: leadership, women's groups, men, young people and childhood.

We need a new biblical-theological reflection to reveal how male-centred interpretations of the Bible perpetuate inequality and violence against women.

We need to know and be trained on Human Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Rights so as to enjoy them and demand their fulfillment by political, educational and health authorities.

We need to work with families, facing prevention in the issues of Domestic Violence, so as to establish healthy families.

To influence the Government to administer justice in a transparent way, to ensure a real access to justice for women who are victims and survivors of violence.

To promote and do advocacy work so that the media do not use women's image as a commercial sexual object, or encourage violence against women.

To design training programmes, attention and shelter to women and families victims of violence, for their pastoral, psychological and legal support, which allows them to participate fully in all spheres of life.

To promote a culture of reporting violence against women in the frame of institutional effectiveness, so as to guarantee their safety and integrity.

## Reading about what we observe in the country

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

## Discussions with the Word from the Bible

**Text for reflection:** Genesis 29:14-30

Jacob stayed with Laban for a month. <sup>15</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' <sup>16</sup> Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup> Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. <sup>18</sup> Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, 'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.' <sup>19</sup> Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.' <sup>20</sup> So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

<sup>21</sup> Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.' <sup>22</sup> So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. <sup>23</sup> But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. <sup>24</sup> (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) <sup>25</sup> When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?' <sup>26</sup> Laban said, 'This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup> Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.' <sup>28</sup> Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. <sup>29</sup> (Laban gave his

maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) <sup>30</sup>So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years. week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.’ Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.

### **From life and the biblical text**

1. The cultural distance between the biblical texts and our present context becomes evident in this text. If we think about the right to marry freely, what do we feel when we read this text? Let us make some general observations on reading the text.
2. What biblical texts can help us to think about the right on which we are reflecting now?
3. In what way are our churches affected by the tradition of reading biblical texts literally, without using hermeneutics to interpret their meaning today?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### **Commentary**

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three persons to express their views regarding it.

Re-reading the scriptures from a gender perspective is fundamental today. The classically literal and man-centred reading of the bible has placed women in a level of inferiority, inequality, exploitation and violence. To read the Bible from the perspective of submission, authority and abuse by men, is absolutely contradictory with the principles and values of the Kingdom, with the message of the Gospel of the good news and the abundant life which Jesus wants for humanity. When there is violence in the couple and the family, we are experiencing a “mismatch”, which goes against the good news of the gospel of the Kingdom. Church leaders must be more sensitive and look beyond legalist positions when women’s rights are not being fulfilled.

### **Tasks and commitments**

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that this right is fulfilled in our ecclesiastical communities, church organisations, church institutions, communities and by the authorities?
2. Try to write a list of three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## **Finishing the meeting**

### **Assessment**

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

### **Closing the liturgy**

CLOSING CANTICLE

Annexes 2

### **A call to commitment**

The following prayer is read by three people

## **Resistance and celebration**

### *Voice 1*

God of all justice, keep us silent  
when the only words we are going to say  
are words of judging, exclusion or prejudice.  
Teach us to confront the wounds of our heart.

### *(Silence)*

God of all justice, give us the power of the word  
which resists injustice, oppression and hatred.  
Not only when it affects us, but above all,  
when it affects others who suffer.  
Make us makers of peace and restorers of  
the ones who are broken off near us.

### *Voice 2*

God of all power, keep us silent  
so that we can hear the pain of others  
in respect, without ignoring it and even, sometimes  
without being able to heal it.  
Because you are present in every one of us.

### *(Silence)*

God of all power, give us the courage  
to share the gift of our word  
So that it might comfort, support and strengthen.  
May we be an advance of your love  
for those in need of love.

### *Voice 3*

God of all love, in the silence of our heart  
give us words of welcome, acceptance and renewal  
so that every time we speak, our words come from you.

### *(Silence)*

God of all love, give us voices of praise  
to celebrate the life of each and every one  
and the glory of creation,  
in the belief that all of us live with your blessing. 12

## **We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment,  
for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 9

# To decide ... by deciding

*“The right to decide whether or not to have children and when to have them: ensuring every person’s access to contraceptive methods”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Ecuador

*We, the people who take part in the CLAI churches in Ecuador, land of volcanoes and snow-capped mountains, enchanted islands and seas, tropical beaches and rainforests, greet our brothers and sisters from Latin America sororally/fraternally. Also, we invite you to share reflections, feelings and proposals regarding the inalienable right of men and women to exert their choice of bringing sons and daughters to the world, with the necessary education and services, in a free and responsible manner, in the frame of love and the light of God’s word. We call on you to continue building together the road to faith, hope, justice and abundant life to which Jesus has invited us.*

#### Opening canticle

Several canticles to start the meetings were suggested in the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use it, otherwise find a suitable one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2)

#### Collective reading

We come to you with trust, Father of Life,  
whose motherly love fills us up with love and grace,  
to ask that we may, through your Spirit,  
discern the best times,  
the best ways to be your witnesses,  
through the decisions we take  
and the actions stemming from them.  
We honour life as the most precious gift you have given us,  
that is why we want to multiply, aware that on doing it,  
we commit to that abundant Life which you demand and encourage.  
Faithful to your Word, which challenges us to justice, to freedom,  
to build up healthy, inclusive and accompanying communities,

we appear before you, in the name of Jesus Christ, our light and guide.  
Amen.

## **We grow strong through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God's hands.

## **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards the "Right to decide whether to have children and when you have them: ensuring every person's access to contraceptive methods", using the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from Ecuador.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

## **About the participants**

Group activity: Each person writes his/her name and a few personal details (age, likes, phrases, etc, whatever they wish) on a big sheet of paper. Each person displays the sheet of paper in front of them.

They walk around the room, trying to relate to others as they read what others have written. Appropriate background music is played, which is interrupted after a certain time so that people change conversation partners. The exercise is over when all the participants have read everybody else's information sheet.

## **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite the participants to make a list of ten do's and don't's, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

## **From a specific reality to dialogue with ours**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Andino Regional Secretary and the CLAI Ecuador National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called a National Consultation on 16th and 17th June 2012 about "The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights", in the city of Quito.

*All human beings in reproductive age have the right and duty to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of the children they wish to have. All persons have the right to access to assisted conception methods, if required. For this right to be fulfilled, they must have the necessary information and means to plan their family. Every person must have access to the widest possible range of modern, safe, effective and acceptable methods of fertility regulation.*

The lack of information concerning SRR in society in general and even more so in the church environment is evident. The consequences of this right not being fulfilled, regarding the lack of information and services is evident and they translate into high maternal mortality rates, teenage pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STT), etc.

There are public laws and regulations, but these are not applied due to lack of political decision and social pressure. Many times they are not exerted or rights are not demanded for fear of retaliation.

The high rate of pregnant adolescent and young women is, by now, a problem in public health.

The situation of violence, helplessness and lack of respect of SRR that women suffer in our country is labelled as high risk, as high vulnerability. Violence against women shows at all social levels in our society as well as in the media.

The leadership in the churches is not sensitized or trained in issues related to SRR, so it is not regarded as a topic in the church agenda, resulting in a lack of spaces to discuss responsible parenthood or methods of fertility regulation, among others.

Many churches are influenced by other doctrines which are against the right to family planning. The topic of abortion is not regarded from an ethical point of view, but from a morality which does not bear relation to reality.

The main issues are not discussed from a gender perspective; it is not a cross-cutting issue –neither in speech, nor in ecclesiastical practices-, which in turn influences the unfulfillment or acceptance of this right.

The churches, their leaders and the ecclesiastical community at large are not exactly a model of shelter, company, comfort and guidance that women need when they have suffered from violence or simply feel obliged to make the decision of having children because they do not have access to information, services, or simply because the model “determines so”, even in adverse conditions and when their wishes oppose the prevailing model.

Although we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Bible is still read in a literal and decontextualized way, lacking gender-sensitive interpretative approaches in the majority of the ecclesiastical communities. This feeds and reproduces a patriarchal model based on unequal relationships among the members of a community.

The impact of maternal mortality and abortion as an ethical issue is not dealt with in the churches, so there is little community and pastoral accompaniment in situations of violence, abuse and abortions. On the other hand, the solutions provided come from religious and moralist ethics, instead of coming from the reality of the facts, that is why the churches do not take a stand on prevention, solidarity and restoration.

In order to disseminate and train the issue of SRR strategically within the churches, with a special emphasis on the right to make the decision whether to bring children to the world, when and how many children to have, we must discuss contraceptive methods openly at an institutional level. We urge pastors and ecclesiastical leaders in general, to take a stand for the full exercise of SRR and to accompany and support the persons who are victims of the chauvinistic society we still live in.

To call for a contextualized reading of God’s word, whose key of interpretation must be gender-sensitive and it must be on the side of those most vulnerable in society.

To create and strengthen alliances with similar institutions, either ecclesiastical, state, private or from the civil society, so as to do advocacy work at those levels which allow the transformation of women’s situation regarding SRR.

To create campaigns to disseminate SRR massively, from a current, appropriate and mature theological perspective. To think about the organization of a pastoral plan on sexuality, with pastors and leaders trained with wide scientific and theological criteria.

To be the makers of Jesus’ Word, by living, day to day, the message of condemnation of the powers which oppress and kill; by becoming an echo of the Good News, expressed in equal, peaceful and respectful relationships, based on justice and love

among the members of an “ekklesia”, celebrating the Easter of liberation to which all of us are called.

### **Reading about what we observe in the country**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

### **Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

This activity is organized in four groups, each of them in charge of a text and answering the corresponding question.

TEXT FOR REFLECTION:

- A. Genesis 38:1-5 “Tamar’s story”
- B. Genesis 29:31-30:24 “Fertility treatments and contraceptive methods”
- C. Song of Solomon 4:5-5:1
- D. 1 Tim. 2:11-15 “Maternity and salvation”

### **From life and the biblical text**

1. Which are the ethical conflicts identified or discerned in the text?
2. Which contraceptive method or methods can you identify in the text?
3. What is the text’s message about the right to decide whether or not to have children, when and how many?
4. In what ways can the teaching in the text be applied in a context?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### **Commentary**

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three people to give their views regarding it.

The challenge we face when approaching the Bible consists of reading texts which were written over two thousand years ago for specific contexts, with a specific intention by the authors and with particular listeners. Hence, a biblical approach to the issue “the right to decide whether or not to have children and when to have them”, must not ignore this challenge. Biblical texts were written within a patriarchal context and as such, they reflect a culture dominated by man, who controlled the decisions on having children or not. A woman and her womb were regarded as man’s property, so any action against their life was considered a crime against his property. A man’s right to decide whether or not to have children was granted by the same laws created by the patriarchal system. But although these laws seemed to defend life, they did not encourage freedom of conscience. Despite the laws which favoured the patriarchal system and exerted violence against women, many actions of resistance by women are mentioned in the biblical texts; from seducing strategies in order to get pregnant, to contraceptive methods and actions of disobedience towards the patriarchal system to achieve emancipation.

In the search and construction of an equitable society, we must admit that although some biblical texts cannot be regarded as liberating for women, a careful reading of these texts does warn us from the dangers or the consequences of following laws which cause exclusion and discrimination against them.

The situations identified in the biblical texts about the “right to decide whether or not to have children and when to have them...” still continue to happen in our societies and their respective contexts –still patriarchal and male-centred. And churches do not escape those contexts, above all those which impose moral laws on sexuality and procreation. However, in each context, as in the biblical texts, there are resistance actions from those who want to make this right be respected and enforced, especially from women. (The commentary may be expanded by reading annex 1-D).

### **Task and commitments**

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that these rights are well-known and spread in our ecclesiastical communities, church organizations, communities and authorities?
2. Try to write in a list three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## **Finishing the meeting**

### **Assessment**

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. –(Annexes 3)

### **Closing the Liturgy**

CLOSING CANTICLE

(Annexes 2)

### **A call to commitment**

We believe in God –Father and Mother- creator of everything visible and invisible, who talks to us throughout the times with the living Word, inspiring freedom and mercy.

We believe in Jesus, the Christ, who lives among us, encouraging us to resist the powers of death as He did, tearing the logic of the world to guide us to the only truth who is love as the space of the Life in abundance, the same love which we have been called to reproduce in the frame of the freedom and responsibility He gave us.

We believe in the Spirit of God who dwells in us since our conception, to reveal the meaning of Life.

We believe in a church that is the bearer of Good News of liberation, healing and salvation, willing to follow the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in their call to multiply Life, grace and mercy...

Amen

### **We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person’s life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 10

# Health and salvation come from the same gift

*“The right to health care and health protection: including women’s right not to be subjected to traditional practices which might endanger their health”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Peru

*Brothers and sisters that participate in this meeting, it is gratifying to share with you these valuable moments, so fruitful for the development of the tasks and projects based on our faith in Christ.*

*We are grateful for the wise decision to hold the National Consultation on Sexual and Reproductive Rights in our country, Perú.*

*We leave to the consideration of our brothers and sisters in faith, hope, love and struggle this material, which we hope helps to enlighten the way to a more just and compassionate world, according to God’s heart.*

#### Opening canticle

Several canticles to start the meetings were suggested in the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use it, otherwise find a suitable one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2)

#### Collective reading

*(M: Man – W: Woman)*

M: We believe that in times of crisis and hopelessness,

W: you are the hope.

M: We believe that, when facing illness and pain,

W: you are the strength and support.

M: We believe that when there is separation in the family,

W: you are the union

M: We believe that when facing loneliness and lack of faith,

W: you are our company.

M: We believe that when facing the darkest situations,

W: you are the light.

M: We ask you to be your instruments  
so that we can reflect...

W: your hope, your strength and your support,  
your union, your company and your light in our brothers and sisters.

### **We grow strong through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God's hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards "The right to health care and health protection: including women's right not to be subjected to traditional practices which might endanger their health", using the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from Peru.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

### **About the participants**

Group activity: The participants sit on their chairs forming a circle. The coordinator stands in the centre. When the coordinator points to anyone and says "Pineapple!", this person must respond by saying the name of the partner sitting to his or her right. If the coordinator says "Orange!", the person must say the name of the partner sitting to his or her left. If he or she makes a mistake or takes longer than three seconds to respond, he or she goes to the centre and the coordinator takes his or her place.

When someone says "Fruit basket!", everybody will change seats. (The one standing in the centre, takes advantage of this and tries to occupy a seat, leaving another partner in the centre).

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite the participants to make a list of ten do's and don'ts, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

## **From a specific reality we begin a dialogue with our reality**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Andino Regional Secretary and the CLAI Peru National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called a National Consultation on 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2012 about "The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights", in the city of Lima, Peru.

*The State will provide and guarantee full access to Sexual and Reproductive Health care services to all women. It is also an obligation from the State and the family to protect girls and women from traditional practices which might endanger their health.*

*"The right to health care and health protection: including women's right not to be subjected to traditional practices which might endanger their health".*

On working with “The right to health care and health protection: including women’s right not to be subjected to traditional practices which might endanger their health”, we have realised that it is mistreatment in the State’s health care system which endangers their health.

When we analyse the situation in Peru, we see that the consequences of the unfulfillment of SRR, which show in statistics related to maternal mortality, teenage pregnancy, unwanted pregnancies, clandestine abortions, poor quality in health services to women and girls, gender-based violence, sexual violence, etc., arise from several actors, which combine to create this problematic situation.

Firstly, we identify the State, which has the biggest responsibility as provider and promoter of people’s health. Health care services and education are poor and insufficient to respond to people’s demands concerning Sexual and Reproductive Health.

Existing laws are not well directed or applied and the conventions for the protection of women are not applied or fulfilled. The application of women’s protection laws leads to annoying, tiresome processes, which humiliate and denigrate the woman who has been mistreated. Many times it is the media which end up using these reports and making profits and increasing audience ratings while promoting morbidity and scandals, instead of respect and dignity.

As for education, there are some State programmes. However, these are insufficient from various points of view. They make campaigns, talks, disseminate literature, but there is not enough continuity or consistence.

Besides, the State does not deal with or do a follow-up of sexual and reproductive health due to economic, power and religious interests. The issue of sexuality has to do with the policy of birth control, rather than with educational policies.

The State creates policies of birth control, directed to young people and regarding them as a social problem. It does not fulfill its role regarding secondary socialization, which is as necessary as primary socialization. It is a serious problem when these two levels of socialization are in crisis.

As well as this, the government does not exert good control over the media, which alienates children’s and young people’s views on sexuality; there is no control over pornography or the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors.

Another actor in our views of Sexual and Reproductive health are the NGOs working on the issues of reproductive health; the effects of their work are not lasting as they focus on the anatomical and physiological aspects, without delving in the social and cultural conditions, which would make a greater impact.

The churches still regard sexuality as taboo, which explains the absence of sex education programmes. There is also a lack of ecclesiastical leaders trained in sexuality issues, which would allow the socialization of these problems in their denominations. The churches do not take a stand and this reinforces their conservative views concerning sexuality. Many times “religiosity” is used to talk about prohibitions, but not about those issues.

The literal reading of the Bible, with all its load of prejudice strengthens ignorance and rejection of sexual issues. The church does not get involved because it would need to know, assume and match the Christian values with our culture.

Family is in crisis. The poor communication between parents and children has serious consequences on the children’s educational level within the context of respect and tolerance. Parents have lost their parental authority. Family is responsible for the absence of love, respect and support to adolescents. Sex education in the family is limited, without taking into account the different stages of their children’s physiological, emotional and relational development. Sexual initiation, learning and experimenting in young people happens in school and among friends. Both permissiveness and prohibitionism are extremes which do not support personal responsibility.

Culture exerts a heavy influence on these issues. Cultural practices weaken women's rights to adequate sexual and reproductive health. Chauvinistic sexual violence against women has a double harmful impact: emotional and social. This is why aggressions are not reported and conformism to violence grows deeper. With silence, scandal and marginalization are avoided, but so are other alternatives of a healthier and more dignified life in every aspect.

### **Reading about what we observe in the country**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

### **Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

**Text for reflection:** Philippians 4:8

<sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

#### **From life and the biblical text**

1. What is the message of this text?
2. Is a good health care service for women in the context of the principles of this text?
3. In what way does this text makes us reflect upon this right?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

#### **Commentary**

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three persons to express their views regarding it.

Without a doubt, this is one of the most important and liberating texts within the Christian message and faith. This text sheds light on the way to the search for what is best for men and women. It breaks and destroys all the daily messages we receive and evaluate from the point of view of the resources we count on, instead of what dignifies us, by virtue of being God's sons and daughters. Therefore, this text dignifies us, makes us worthy and gives us the right to be treated with equal respect and dignity and empowers us to demand and claim this and other rights. (This comment can be expanded by reading annex 1-F).

#### **Tasks and commitments**

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that this right is fulfilled in our ecclesiastical communities, church organisations, church institutions, communities and by the authorities?
2. Try to write a list of three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

### **Finishing the meeting**

#### **Assessment**

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word

what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

### **Closing the liturgy**

CLOSING CANTICLE

Annexes 2

### **A call to commitment**

MERCY

God, our giver of life, enlighten us and encourage us in our mission of being the messengers of your word.

To reach the needs of your people who wail and cry, and beg for your forgiveness.

Our Lord:

Bless the youth in their sexuality and responsible reproduction,  
to lead a full life, according to your will. Amen.

### **We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 11

# Reproductive health and science, a rights-based binomial

Reproductive health and science, a rights-based binomial

*“The right to benefit from scientific progress: including the appropriate reproductive health technology”.*

### Opening of the Meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Mexico

*Dear brothers and sisters of the churches, faith-based organizations, and civil society organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean. We, Mexico, have been assigned to work on “the Right to benefit from scientific progress: including the appropriate reproductive health technology”, in reference to the human right which means a direct struggle for the defence of life, for quality of life and for lowering statistics on breast and uterine cancer, maternal mortality, risk-free family planning, health care for persons with HIV or AIDS and other illnesses related to sexual and reproductive health.*

*We hope, through this meeting, to contribute to the reflection of the churches and ecumenical organizations and take on the commitments through specific actions, as well as the fulfillment of this right in order to generate currents of public opinion which influence the will of decision makers with the ability to bring about the changes that these issues require.*

*It is our prayer, that the Lord may give us the necessary wisdom to make good and appropriate decisions at the service of Sexual and Reproductive Health with quality, equality, promptness and justice.*

#### Opening chant

Several chants were suggested during the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use these, otherwise find one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2).

#### Collective Reading

Oh God, you are the hope in all corners of Earth,  
The God of every living being. We beg for all the races

And families on Earth, make all hearts reach out to you.  
Dispel the hatred in our minds, the prejudice and scorn  
towards those who are not our colour, race, class or belief,  
so that in driving away separation, we can be guided by you  
towards the spirit of unity, in a bond of peace, that is our hope.

### **We become stronger through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to pray, putting the meeting in God's hands.

### **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of the meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality as regards "The right to benefit from scientific progress: including the appropriate reproductive health technology" using the materials prepared by a group of brothers and sisters from Mexico.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

### **About the participants**

Group activity: Echoing the ancestral Náhuatl culture from Mexico, each participant chooses an animal that he/she identifies with and describes it by giving its characteristics, explaining the reason for the identification with that particular animal and finishing by saying his/her name, organization and place of origin.

### **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite the participants to make a list of ten do's and don'ts, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

### **From a specific reality to dialogue with ours**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Regional Secretary for Central America and the CLAI Mexico National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called several meetings between June and September 2012 about "The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights" at the Emmanuel Centre, in the city of Mexico.

*The Right concerning the benefits of scientific progress, including the appropriate reproductive health technology, guarantees people's free decision on how to experience their own bodies in the sexual and reproductive areas, acknowledging the close relation between this issue and scientific progress, which guarantees a high standard of reproductive health at a really affordable cost. We must ensure, in church congregations and their communities, as well as in society in general, that this right is equal for all persons, cherishing the hope that scientific progress is available to every person that requires it, especially women and young people, as well as men from the most vulnerable and excluded sectors.*

México is a country which makes many efforts concerning Sexual and Reproductive Health. However, there is deep inequality. The sexual and reproductive practices of its citizens depend largely on a wide and very differentiated range of living condi-

tions. Poverty levels, as well as the deficiencies in education, nutrition, health care and prevention with the latest technologies and social rights have an impact on the State, the one in charge of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH).

To understand the challenges of SRH from the perspective of human rights, social justice and the citizenship means to accept that Mexico must get rid of all the inequalities –especially gender, economic, ethnic and age inequalities- in its health policies and plans, instead of assimilating them, as it agreed to do in the Programme of Action of the IV International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) and the Sexual and Reproductive Rights, created in 1995. This situation requires one basic action so that everyone can have access to scientific and technological progress and it is the need to democratize reproductive health care, the key principles being: the access to scientific information and its use with justice, and the right to receive quality services regardless of the social, economic and racial background.

From this perspective and based on the women and young people's social movements, the Reproductive Health Action Programme was set up in Mexico. Its fundamental goal is to lessen the regional differences in the reproductive health indicators in the country, with special emphasis on the rural areas and the municipalities with high and very high marginalization.

The goals of the programme focus on increasing technical and scientific information which arises continually from scientific research, as well as on education so as to promote the exercise of Sexual and Reproductive Rights, bearing in mind the cultural diversity of the population groups; facilitating the access to reproductive health services of adolescent groups, indigenous groups, persons with disabilities, rural and urban marginalized population as well as encouraging more integration of the achievements in medical research for sexual health and reproductive health care. Integration entails a better understanding of the progress, the availability of such services and the cultural, geographical and economic aspects of the different population groups. The goals of the programme state that the regulations guarantee the right of every man and woman to benefit from scientific progress at social, academic and public health institutions. Emergency contraception was approved by consensus in the Official Mexican Standard related to Family Planning, Gender Equality and Reproductive Health.

Although the scientific, technical and social progress of recent years have improved the average standards of reproductive health in the country considerably, in 2010 the difference in the use of this progress –especially regarding fertility, reproductive health and contraceptive methods- between urban and rural areas was almost 20 percentage points, showing a lag of approximately 16 years in rural communities for this indicator.

Family planning operative actions have consolidated all over the country, as a result of thorough work in both, public and private sectors and organized civil society. We now have the Official Mexican Standard in family planning services, which has adopted the latest scientific and technological advances in the field of contraception, as well as technical documents on methods of fertility regulation, guidance and counselling, informed consent and SRR, among others.

Evangelical, protestant and catholic churches in Mexico are considered as the most conservative in Latin America. In general, neither these issues, nor any issues concerning sexuality are included in their agendas or other discussion processes. However, several churches have hospitals, health centres and schools where these issues are addressed and discussed professionally; there are members of the congregations who also work in social and political development and are interested in building bridges to fight for the access to Human Rights and scientific and technological progress in SRR.

Therefore, we must consider that there are allies trying to make agreements and reach consensus to extend the reach of our participation and commitment regarding political advocacy and educational processes, sensitization and raising awareness within our churches and their surrounding communities.

Thus, we must put forward new proposals for round tables so as to reflect on issues of SRR with leaders and pastors, especially the right to access to scientific and technological progress related to sexual and Reproductive Health care; workshops with the youth about these issues including the production of practical manuals written in their language; increasing forums of women leaders towards the congregations, regarding SRR issues on a faith-based perspective and with biblical references.

### **Reading about what we observe in the country**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

### **Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

TEXT FOR REFLECTION: MARKUS 5:24-34

<sup>24</sup>So Jesus went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. <sup>25</sup>Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup>She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup>She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup>for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' <sup>29</sup>Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup>Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' <sup>31</sup>And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' <sup>32</sup>He looked all round to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup>But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup>He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

### **From life and the biblical text**

1. What questions does this text arise, facing the difficulties or the denial to scientific progress as regards sexual and reproductive health today?
2. Was Jesus aware of the attempt to claim a right concerning sexuality in those days?
3. How can we make the text applicable to our days so as to let Jesus' example modify the theology about sexuality and rights in our church?

Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

### **Commentary**

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three people to share their views about it.

Jesus transgresses the Jewish laws in their religious, health-related, social and cultural aspects, in reference to the background text, which is Lev 15:19:33; as well as the laws on gender and social class in order to realise the rights of dignity and social life to its fullest.

Although the text does not refer to the Right to access to technological and

scientific progress regarding SRR, it does expose the exercise of the right to Sexual and Reproductive Health in terms of removing laws which prevent life in abundance when it comes to e.g. health, gender-equality and social life.

When she ran out of all her properties, (in the eyes of the social system, she owned nothing, but she had heard of Jesus and his miraculous healings), she set off and joined the crowd of sick people who crammed around Jesus when he was on his way to Jairus' house. This woman gathered strength to make way in the crowd and thought "if I just get to touch his clothes, then I will be healed".

She breaks up with legalism; her wish to be healed is stronger than any norm or social prejudice. Fearfully, she reaches out and touches Jesus' clothes. Her daring attitude frees Jesus, who was on his way with Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, to heal his daughter and chooses those who are truly marginalized, especially women, who – as members of his movement in Galilee- taught him much on popular medicine and wisdom. Jesus acknowledges and confirms the healing faith of this anonymous woman who does not have anyone to represent her. "Your faith has healed you." We must follow this woman who has given us a guideline to transform a society which stigmatizes and excludes God's people.

The three Synoptic Gospels tell the story of this nameless and unrepresented woman, either her father or husband. "... a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years" (Mt 9,18-22; Mc 5,25-34; Lc 8,43-48). But Mark tells the story even more dramatically. "She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had and she was no better, but rather grew worse"; these words let us know the situation of financial impoverishment that this incurable sick woman endured. To her, problems lay on her physical illness, due to her incurable disease and, in her permanent state of impurity she might have felt internally impure as well as making everything she touched impure (Lv 15,19-31). Due to her state of impurity, she was excluded from the community, from God's people. The law made her avoid all contact with others and it made them avoid her. She is not considered as a person within the cultural environment where social roles are imposed on women. (Marcia Moya R. and Helmut Renard, RIBLA, CLAI)

## **Tasks and commitments**

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that these rights are well-known and spread in our ecclesiastical communities, church organizations, communities and authorities?
2. Try to write in a list three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## **Finishing the meeting**

### **Assessment**

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

### **Closing the Liturgy**

CLOSING CANTICLE

(Annexes 2)

### **A call to commitment**

COLLECTIVE READING

## **Prayer**

PIECES...

Pieces...

A world in pieces,

Life in pieces...

We want to live a new time,

God our Lord,

We want to see signs of hope

That it is possible to pick all the fragments together

And build unity in this world.

We cry out for your spirit of unity,

So that it comes

From the four corners of earth

And blows life over our entire being...

Come, spirit of God,

And send forth fresh winds of renewal

Which can infuse us with energy and vigour

So that the pieces become

A body,

The body of the world,

The body of the people,

Because you have created us that way,

that way you wish us to be.

*(EBC, Brazil, 1993).*

## **We leave, strengthened by prayer**

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

## Meeting 12

# To meet as both a right and a blessing

*“The right to freedom of assembly and association: including the right to influence governments to place a priority on sexual health and rights and the right not to be subjected to torture and mistreatment; including the rights of women, men, young people and children to be protected from violence, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse eliminating all violence against women”.*

### Opening of the meeting

#### Greeting and invitation from Colombia

*The churches and organizations taking part in the Consultation held in Colombia greet our brothers and sisters from Latin America and the Caribbean who participate in this meeting. Colombia, the land of coffee and cumbia, of the Atlantic and the Pacific, of plains and the Caribbean sun.*

*This beautiful community has been facing a situation of political and social violence for over half a century. From our hard reality and history, we invite all the churches to call out to the God of Life to bless our pilgrimage of faith, allow us to be witnesses of peace in our continent and to work dauntlessly in order to achieve the respect and fulfillment of this and other rights.*

#### Opening chant

Several chants were suggested during the National Consultations. If you know the music, you may use these, otherwise find one which is well-known in your environment, referring to justice or rights. (Annexes 2).

#### Group reading

*To be read in unison, as a community prayer*

URBAN PSALM

I lift my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth, who made city and desert. Free me, oh God, from violence in the roads and from injustice in the palaces of exploitation of the rich, from the shame of wicked politicians, from blood crimes and white-collar criminals, from the traps of the media, the idolatry of consumption

and the temples of the market.

My soul longs for the Lord more than the homeless long for the end of the storm.

More than a sentinel watches for the morning, all the city watches for the Lord

For with the Lord is mercy and no misery; for with Him is favour and no fear;

For with Him is hope and no hopelessness

In other words, in Him is Life forever and happiness. (happy city) 13

## **We become stronger through prayer**

Invite a person in the group to say a prayer and put the meeting in God's hands.

## **Presentation of goals**

The facilitator presents the goals of this meeting:

1. The goal of this Meeting is to reflect upon our reality regarding "The Right of freedom of assembly and association, using the materials prepared by a group of work of brothers and sisters from Colombia.
2. Identify some causes and reasons why that right is not fulfilled in our countries.
3. Find a correlation between the God's word and the aforementioned right.
4. Propose some actions, with specific gestures, for the commitment of the churches.

## **About the participants**

Group activity: Each person says his/her name followed by a part of the body that itches: "I am John and my mouth itches". The following person says the previous person's name and what part of his/her body itched, as well as saying their own name and a part of the body that itches. The last person must say everybody's name starting by the first person and every person's body part that itched.

## **Participation agreements**

Here, the coordinators of the Meeting invite participants to make a list of ten do's and don'ts, which will frame the dynamics of participation throughout the event, in full respect to what has been agreed.

## **From a specific reality we begin a dialogue with our reality**

*The right and the materials which emerged from the meeting in each country are read. The text is read out loud in groups of four, dividing the paragraphs into the participants.*

The Regional Secretary for the Caribbean and Greater Colombia and the CLAI Colombia National Board, with the support of the national UNFPA, called a National Consultation on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> June 2012 about "The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights" at the Emmanuel Centre, in the city of Medellin.

*This right summons us to get together, associate and try to influence governments to place a priority on sexual and reproductive health and rights. It also emphasises people's protection against degrading treatment or violence related to sexuality and reproduction, especially when in times of armed conflicts. It encourages the access to education and services regarding Sexual and Reproductive Health.*

Sexual and reproductive rights in Colombia are influenced by different aspects of the conflict: economic, social and political.

In order to make a change, it is necessary to acknowledge the different situations of violation of Human Rights and SRR. The violation of Human Rights in Colombia

has gone beyond the armed conflict and has lessened the rights of the most vulnerable population: women, girls and young people. Violence is visible, it exists and it is present in all the realities of our society, in all the daily situations.

The rights we have stated are consecrated in our National Constitution but they are not carried out in the practice. The policies of the Colombian State concerning Sexual and reproductive rights are very weak and it is not convenient for the State that these rights are fulfilled, so it does not facilitate the necessary spaces for the education and validity of these.

We perceive a rise in adolescent and young women's pregnancies. A large number of women carry out clandestine abortions which put their lives at risk. There is little access of women to information on family planning methods. The Ministry of Education closed down the national sex education programme in schools. Few churches have assumed the issues of sexuality at the congregations.

The church is an important space for reunion and participation, but it is also an excluding place which controls freedom. Freedom is a transcendental issue in the Bible; a new reading of the Bible must be made in the light of life and freedom itself in our present times and our reality (contextual). Freedom in the Bible must be an important aspect in our days. The prophetic voice of churches (announce and report) has been paralysed many times for fear of retaliation, not only from armed sectors, but also from conservative sectors which have double moral standards. This prevents the church from reporting the violation of Human Rights, corruption, lack of political will from the State to fulfil welfare policies and prevents it from dealing with issues of sexuality within the church itself.

The church is often more concerned about the compliance of religious norms, starting by the "duties" that the members of the congregations must fulfil in their Christian lives, but has forgotten the rights of the members (including civil, sexual and reproductive rights) in the different contexts of daily life.

The church must make progress regarding its work with people who choose a different option of living their sexuality; it must be inclusive. It must work towards the participation of the civil society within the spaces established by law so as to deal with the deepest problems in the community. It must publicly denounce the various human rights violations.

A new Biblical reading of Human Rights and SRR in the light of life and reality is necessary.

It is about decolonising our mind: rereading biblical texts which have been used to dominate women and impose oppressive models of sexuality. It is necessary to examine the violence throughout the Bible. If sexuality is a social construct, it is possible to reconstruct it by demystification of the patriarchal theology.

This constructive process requires the political will from the governing bodies of the churches, so as to include this issue in the public discussions of the church, congregations and communities. As well as this, the integration of the topic intentionally, in every area, core idea or mission approach will allow a broader dialogue and real action to stop the violence exerted from the church and the interpretation of the biblical texts against the different social groups immersed in their social reality, thus acknowledging the differences and the inclusion from a gender perspective.

We need to feel that the church is going through a new time, so a new ethical approach is required, one which liberates sexuality and seeks in the Bible for inspiration to question those conceptions which relate experiences of sexuality with sin and guilt. This reconstruction of experiences of sexuality releases the bodies –especially those of women's- and places them in protagonist roles in other areas.

To understand sexuality from a liberating perspective, is to conceive it as one of God's gifts, a divine blessing which has the body as its divine house and is experi-

enced as a breath of the spirit that must be treated with dignity and respect.

We need to strengthen the bonds between the churches at CLAI with UNFPA Colombia, for mutual support as regards Sexual and Reproductive Rights; to take action, together with other churches and similar institutions in civil society, so that the State resumes the subject of Sex Education in educational institutions. To monitor, from the civil society, the fulfillment of the conventions which Colombia has established with the United Nations on the issues of Sexual and Reproductive Rights. To lead educational spaces together with other NGOs and the UNFPA on the issue of Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

### **Text on what we observe in the country**

The following questions are answered at the end:

1. What does the text say? The group makes a brief summary of the text.
2. What do we say about the text? Questions arising from the reading of the text are formulated now.
3. What do we say to the group? The readers present short phrases to the rest of the group. These can be applications, reflections or practical implications from the reading.

### **Discussions with the Word from the Bible**

**Text for reflection:** Mark 10:13-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>13</sup>People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup>Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' <sup>16</sup>And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

#### **From life and the biblical text**

1. In what way does the right to freedom of assembly and association reflect in this text? Who are those affected?
2. What reasons might the disciples have had to reprimand the children and try to prevent them from going to Jesus?
3. How does the violation to this right show in our times? Who tries to prevent that right? Each group presents their answers, according to the time the coordinator of the meeting assigns.

#### **Commentary**

The facilitator reads the text and asks two or three persons to express their views regarding it.

At different times, God's word clearly teaches us and challenges us to live in a different way, to understand how to discover both a personal life and a life of community that allow us to live in harmony with others. It gives us all the necessary freedom to enable us to learn how to be better human beings and live in dignity. God gives us freedom to make decisions in a frame of rights and responsibilities. God values his creation highly, especially the human being and that is the core message of our faith. The Gospels assert the rights to lead a worthy and abundant life as well as the liberties that let us live as God's sons and daughters. (The commentary can be expanded by reading the text of the annex 1-C).

## Tasks and commitments

Work on the following questions:

1. What actions can we take so that this right is fulfilled in our ecclesiastical communities, church organisations, church institutions, communities and by the authorities?
2. Try to write a list of three particular actions that can be taken from the churches. Present them in the plenary meeting in a creative way.

## Finishing the meeting

### Assessment

Ask for the participants to form a circle and each participant to express in one word what the experience was like for him or her. Ask for each person to fill out an assessment sheet. (Annexes 3)

### Closing the liturgy

CLOSING CANTICLE

Annexes 2

### A call to commitment

CREED OF HOPE

I believe in God as the protective Father  
Who shelters my hesitant steps  
Guide in nights of fear  
Friend in hopeless days.  
I believe in God as a loving Mother  
Supportive at my limitations  
Who sustains my longing dreams  
And keeps my hopes alive  
I believe in God as a Saviour,  
Who takes care of me in my wrong steps  
Who teaches me the song of victory  
And Lord, who whispers words that encourage me to live;  
I believe in God as Spirit  
Wind that soothes the fury of everyday life  
That inspires the tired flesh  
And gives meaning to that which the eyes cannot see  
I believe in God as “wordless”  
Beyond religions and dogmas,  
Beyond words and definitions,  
Beyond me, you and us  
I believe in God, in the way I can believe.  
(*Unknown*)

### We leave, strengthened by prayer

Invite a person to say a prayer giving thanks for the day of work, the commitment, for each person's life, the church and the institutions which took part in it.

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## ANNEXES

### Annex 1

Biblical-theological statements and to RSS related papers

- A. Manifiesto from the Churches and Ecumenical Organisations in Venezuela regarding Sexual and Reproductive Rights
- B. Recommendations of the Puerto Rico National Board facing femicide and violence against women
- C. The Church and Sexual and Reproductive Rights\*: Towards a new construction
- D. The right to decide whether or not to have children and when to have them: Ensuring that all persons have access to contraceptive methods
- E. Human being, image of God
- F. Biblical vision of the human body
- G. “Sexual discrimination: Progress and setbacks of the historical protestant churches”
- H. Against all discrimination, we embrace our brothers and sisters
- I. Contributions from the National Consultation CLAIUNFPA Bolivia
- J. The right to freedom of thought regarding sexuality and reproduction
- K. What the Bible calls us to do, when confronted with the situations of femicide suffered by women in Puerto Rico
- L. Reading between the lines in the discussion about religion, state and sexual and reproductive rights

#### **Anexo 2**

Songs to celebrate

#### **Anexo 3**

Assessment sheets

#### **Anexo 4**

CD with supporting documents

## A. Manifesto from the Churches and Ecumenical Organisations in Venezuela regarding Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Called by the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), the Faith-based Organizations doing Service in HIV (FBO-HIV) and Ecumenical Action, we gathered in the city of Caracas from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> September 2012 to reflect upon and take on the challenges presented by Sexual and Reproductive Health, interpreted in the light of Human Rights, as a commitment to life, hope and faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

Western society, and particularly the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, hold on to deep-rooted sexist and male chauvinistic religious and cultural patterns, which have penetrated social communication with a discourse on sexuality focused on genitality, oriented towards man's pleasure and the use of woman as an object of pleasure. Besides, the dominant message in heterosexuality encourages non-liberating standards, such as the forced choice of partners, the pressure for boys, girls and teenagers to be sexually initiated, the "display" of virility by male teenagers and women's submission. This discourse has been detrimental, since it naturalizes violence towards women and disregards the existence and rights of other groups within the range of sexual diversity that do not fit into the obligatory heterosexual pattern.

We stand at a moment in history in which human sexuality is beginning to be understood as an expression of affection, as a space for meeting and enjoying, and within our ecclesiastical communities, as a commitment to the reproduction of life, a gift from the Creator God (Gn 1, 27-31b)

We are also aware of the great void in sex education, the taboos and misinformation which have hindered the experience of a free, healthy, safe and responsible sexuality. This misinformation, which the ecclesiastic communities cannot escape from either, has created much stigma and discrimination towards persons and groups.

We understand that the renewal of our communities of faith needs their members' personal experience of conversion towards new realities of vulnerability where God's

face is also hidden and revealed (Jn 3, 3). That is why our efforts go into detecting excluded persons and groups and creating spaces for their inclusion, equity and equality from the perspective of Jesus of Nazareth (Mk 5, 21-43).

Therefore, we take on the challenge to promote information and education on Sexual and Reproductive Health, interpreting it from an integral approach of rights which encompasses the physical, mental, social and spiritual welfare and development of the human person, through processes of empowerment and building of new life plans.

Consequently:

1. We observe that teenagers in Latin America are a high percentage of the population and see the difficulty from our governments to take advantage of this demographic bonus; there are obstacles in the labour and educational system to take in the large number of young people. On being excluded, they become more vulnerable concerning Sexual and Reproductive Health: non-planned pregnancies and parenthood, Sexually transmitted Diseases, lack of life plans.

Therefore, we consider adolescents as our priority (Lk 13, 13-15) and propose the strengthening of a youth ministry which provides education on issues of Sexual and Reproductive Rights from the perspective of faith according to the situation in each country. We also propose the creation of an ecumenical youth ministry for HIV and AIDS with an integral approach.

2. We are very concerned about the phenomenon of bullying which boys, girls and adolescents suffer due to their sexual orientation as well as their gender identity and expression, also linked to other factors such as ethnicity, physical or socio-economic conditions, among other reasons. In many cases, students bring into the classroom the patterns of violence, stigma and discrimination inherited and reinforced in the family, the community, the school staff, the media and the churches.

Therefore, we need to organize the processes of sex education and information in educational centres together with the teachers, fathers, mothers, representatives, communal councils, neighbour associations and student groups (Jn 17, 21-23).

3. We recognize the need to promote changes in the ecclesiastic structures as regards gender equity and equality, how to identify the symbolic violence underlying our interpersonal relations, ecclesiastical communities and society at large; expressed in attitudes, actions, language and gestures which stigmatize and exclude women, boys, girls and adolescents, persons who live with HIV, with disabilities, with sexual diversity and other vulnerable groups who, in turn, suffer from discrimination for many other reasons (age, skin colour, economic condition, religious group, etc.)

Therefore, we suggest creating new spaces for dialogue in our ecclesiastical communities for theological and biblical training regarding the issue of sexual diversity, so as to promote inclusion, respect, non discrimination and to strengthen the already existing spaces (Acts 8:26-40).

4. We state that, within our ecclesiastical communities, we have had difficulties in the understanding and recognition of sexual diversity, which in turn, has generated discriminative and stigmatizing attitudes and actions.

Therefore, we commit to recognize the dignity of these persons as rights-holders, created in God's image and liking. (Jn 9).

5. We recognize that we perform the role of social communicators regarding Sexual and Reproductive Health in our ecclesiastical communities, but unfortunately, there is a lack of training among religious leaders and there are many messages which violate the rights and dignity of the people.

Therefore, let us perform this role from a rights perspective, in an atmosphere of inclusion, equity and equality, through the training of ecclesiastical leaders and the whole community on Sexual and Reproductive Rights (Mt 9, 9-13; Mk 4, 33-34).

6. We recognize that the discourse on reality we have built up in our ecclesiastical communities invisibilise different vulnerable groups, increasing the stigma and discrimination. We understand that it is necessary for our pastoral and ecclesiastical practices to be more inclusive regarding people who live with HIV and AIDS, people of sexual diversity, adolescents, women, disabled people; it is necessary for us to sensitize in the face of this reality by meeting these groups and finding spaces, gestures, actions and words which include us all (Mt 5, 1-12; Lk 8, 1-3).
7. We understand that, to a great extent, stigma and discrimination originate due to wrong or incomplete information about topics related to sexuality. Although there is a valuable legal and educational framework for sexual and reproductive health in our country, the State has not promoted it enough and the educational institutions are generally unaware of these tools.

Therefore, we commit to demand that the Venezuelan State socializes the current laws on Sexual and Reproductive Health, and at the same time, to learn the legal and institutional framework in order to be able to promote Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the training spaces of our ecclesiastical communities (Lk 20, 9-19). We also invite the ecclesiastical communities which have educational institutions to include teachers' training in Sexual and Reproductive Health, using the present study plans in the country as a basis.

8. We acknowledge the existence of pastoral initiatives, spaces for reflection and the production of documents with guidelines in issues of sex education in some spaces of our ecclesiastical communities, despite the difficulties that the issue creates for them. As CLAI National Board and Faith-based Organizations with service in HIV, we commit to disseminate the results and fruits of our training and planning meetings using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (Mk 4, 33-34).
9. We acknowledge the difficulties we have, as an ecumenical collective, in our work as a network, which hinders the promotion and impact of our actions and proposals on issues of Sexual and Reproductive Health.

Therefore, we propose that we should get training on networking so as to optimize the realization of our projects and their personal, ecclesiastical and social impact (Jn 15, 5. 11-17).

## B. Recommendations of the Puerto Rico National Board facing femicide and violence against women.

What must be the answer of the Churches facing femicide and violence against women? We bear in mind that femicide is an extreme –the one which annihilates WOMEN’ S LIVES- of the daily practices of systematic violence which women suffer throughout their lives.

### **General answers**

1. To raise awareness on gender violence, particularly femicide –stressing that this problem is not an exclusive problem of “the world” (that it also happens in our churches).
2. To label gender violence as a sin.
3. To acknowledge the presence and persistence of practices within the churches –as in all social institutions- which promote violence against women.
4. To encourage that the churches use their money where there are ideas; that they support initiatives of attention and prevention of gender violence financially and with the necessary resources.
5. The leadership in the churches have to commit themselves to transform patriarchal mentality, so that they can be a guide for the parishioners’ conversion.
6. To create a “Justice for Women” Ministry/Pastoral, which integrates both prevention and attention to the problem of violence against women and promotion of gender equality and incorporates the historical and daily categories of patriarchal power and domination.

### **Specific answers**

1. To develop training programmes for pastoral groups and lay leaders on reinterpretation of the Bible, interpretation and re-contextualization from a human rights and gender perspective, including sexual and reproductive rights and culture of peace (pastoral and educational practice for a culture of peace).

2. To open the temples which are empty during the day, so that they function as shelters and refuges as well as places of education for the community.
3. To provide constant private and public company (including financial, emotional and pastoral support) to victims and survivors of gender violence.
4. To allocate a fair item in the Church budget to address issues related to prevention and eradication of violence against women.
5. To give shelter and avoid rejection and prejudice against victims.
6. To develop curricula for gender equality for Sunday schools.
7. To produce educational materials which link faith with denunciation and action – including both the personal and political aspects.
8. To incorporate gender perspective in liturgies.
9. To promote women's leadership and incorporation in the different ministries of the churches –but not only those directly related to women- so that the churches can be a model and example of inclusion and equity.
10. To create shelters for victims of maltreatment and their children as well as supporting the already existing ones.
11. The churches must financially support institutions working with on this issue or sheltering victims/survivors and, in turn, they should get training and orientation from them.
12. To develop a curriculum to educate pastors who assist victims and survivors of sexual abuse, domestic violence, violence against members of LGBTT communities and other forms of gender violence.
13. To develop curricula of continuing education for pastors on issues such as: masculinity, gender, violence against women, violence based on sexual orientation, human rights.
14. To form groups to educate men regarding equality, respectful couple relationships and non-violence –within the frame of studies of the new, liberating masculinities.
15. To create educational groups for children and young people addressing culture issues and practices of peace.
16. To create collaborative links with women organizations working for the recognition of women's human rights.
17. To establish relations between the churches to denounce violence against women in the media.
18. To develop and publish an inclusive, non-violent curriculum of Biblical school for children.

19. To include the discussion on the Charter of Children's Rights as a regular practice in Biblical schools.
20. To devote the necessary time to training, analysis and reflection to work on these issues, avoiding the haste which may result in superficialities and is part of the imposed patriarchal violence.
21. To create manuals to guide and direct fair and equitable actions against gender violence, sexual violence and institutional violence.
22. To participate in public discussions and make liberating statements from a gender perspective, around the issues which affect men's and women's lives due to inequalities and gender violence.
23. To recognise the needs of elderly women and create initiatives to defend and accompany them if they are or have been victims of sexual aggressions and/or domestic violence.

Submitted by Nina Torres-Vidal and Mercedes Rodríguez. 20th June, 2012

# C. THE CHURCH AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS\*: TOWARDS A NEW CONSTRUCTION

*Mg. Adelaida Jiménez C*

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## **Introduction**

I will address the issue of the learning experiences I had during my pastoral activities with the communities, where I had the opportunity to work as a pastor - from the learning experiences in my theological studies to my experience with students from different denominations in my work as a teacher and director of the CUR Theology programme- and, why not?, to acknowledge, from my personal experience, the new learning processes and ruptures I have had to go through, as a woman, against many conceptions of sexual and reproductive rights. This learning process and ruptures has not been easy, perhaps because we still blush when we are asked questions or when we talk about the topic. Also, because women's sexuality is still being hushed and denied in our century, amidst a patriarchal system which does not want to admit the need for breaking traditional paradigms and start approaching masculinity from a new perspective. A patriarchal system which continues teaching sexuality to boys and girls, adolescents, young people, women and men as a taboo that one cannot talk about, or simply as something bad about which one must feel ashamed. Furthermore, it does not even conceive the possibility of a dialogue from a gender perspective when dealing with other expressions of sexuality.

We speak very little about the topic in our churches, and very little or nothing at all in others. I suspect that the topic is not in the public agendas of our reformed churches in Colombia, so the voice we keep hearing is the voice of our sister, the Catholic Church.

Therefore, we will approach this issue from our experiences, from previous discussions, supported by some questions which will frame the discussion, such as: How have we been learning about Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the Church? How did they teach us in the Church what the Bible says about sexuality and who decides on reproduction? How could we create a new approach to talk about Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the Churches we belong to? The participation of the delegates will enrich the discussions we share.

## How have we been learning about Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the Church?

In order to discuss this question, we need to turn to the context and to the historical constructions about what sexuality is. And why, even when the churches have their roots in the Protestant Reformation movement, there has not been any progress on the construction of open-minded ideas about Sexual and Reproductive Rights. What has happened?

We start this brief reflection remembering that there are experiences in other cultures and religious movements which regain the sense of the body and the sexuality and incorporate the body to the whole development of human life as an act of the Creator for humanity in an open way. We will go back today, to the historical roots which have influenced our way of thinking about sexuality. That is how we find, according Schott that, “in Greek religion and philosophy, women represented society with their body and sexuality, due to their role of generating life, which brings the threat of death” (2003, 15). This implied that Plato and Aristotle despised women as the incarnation of the dangers caused by sexuality, “women, who dominated by their passions, were inept for rational acts” (15). We might recognise that these ideas have been woven from Christian opinions, stemming from the Greek and Hebrew religions.

Therefore, these conceptions opened the way for concepts of sexuality, purity and virginity that began to shape the discussions about the body and sexuality. A topic discussed, logically, by the patriarchal tradition, with a strong burden upon woman. In this regard, we will not make use of all the ideas of the thinkers who inspired the Church Fathers, but we will highlight those which, from my perspective, have been taken up again and again throughout the history of the church. One of the lines of thought which has transcended the most is Saint Augustine’s way of “approaching sexuality, lust, women; the way he treated flesh and blood human beings represented an important dimension of the Christian doctrines and his thought was strengthened in the Middle Ages.” (Schott, 2003, 16).

In this regard, we think that the way Augustine deals with sexuality is framed by the concept of the sin of man that he develops. “Sexual desire is one form of the more general state of desiring that he calls concupiscence, or lust” (17). This means that the body is considered as a source of desire and hence, something bad. Thus, all forms of lust are regarded as punishment for the ill will which doomed the human race to misfortune. In addition, all this confirms that the body is bad and the only good thing is the soul, which needs to be freed from the prison of the body. Accordingly, it is surprising how Augustine “warns that the pleasures of the senses –taste, hearing, smell and vision (17), expose the soul to the dangers of temptation and desire”, manifesting perhaps (we interpret his way of thinking) a state of weakness, so that the only way left is rejection and denial of the sexual drive . Hence, leading a life of continence would drive him closer to God. This has profound implications, as it makes us think that sexuality would not be, then, an instrument for human love, which is also due to the condemnation of the woman’s body that Augustine expresses, considering it as a source of temptation and desire, to be used.

In this regard, we point out that the concept of Augustine about sexuality stems from the idea that “sexuality must be an instrument for procreation only, understanding that woman, in this dimension, has been made for man, to whom she is naturally subjugated” (22).

Another idea we would like to emphasise, due to its later implications and for having marked a worldview in the Middle Ages as well as a way of thinking in the period of the reformation, is Thomas Aquinas' ideas of women and sexuality. According to Schott, Thomas Aquinas thinks that "The concept of purity in the Scriptures is based on the rejection of sexual pleasure of the body –which, in his view interferes with spiritual well-being" (2003,39). This thought demarcates an entire way of thinking which, in turn, generates rejection and a whole system of oppression against the woman and especially, her body, of denying the possibility of enjoying her sexuality. From these ideas, different thoughts about the body, sexuality and how these two should be controlled are formulated. So, while Augustine tried to control the body by will, Saint Thomas Aquinas, developed the control of the body and desires by reason. However, these two ways of thinking and controlling the body and desires end up in the same conclusion: rejection of the body and sexuality as God's gift, which was, besides, given for humankind's enjoyment.

Furthermore, on reading about the development in the X and XII centuries, especially in the monastic orders, we see that the dissemination of ideas about asceticism of the body and sexuality were strengthened, particularly those in relation with the female body. In those days, according to history, "the cult of Mary grew considerably, with its glorification of virginity, which states that women must be purified from a corrupt sexuality, affirming the thought of the virgin conception and that Mary did not lose her virginity at Jesus' conception or birth."(Schott, 2003, 41). Instead of benefiting women, or being an important opportunity for them, this created more degrading concepts about the woman and her body. It was even said that the women who lost their virginity could never be represented by the image of the idealised mother, Mary, since those women had not been able to fight temptation (41).

In this respect, on looking back at history and the construction of these thoughts, women were offered the alternative of a life in the convent so as to perform a role within Christianity; "if getting married brought about dozens of virtues, virginity brought about hundreds" (41). Perhaps we can understand today, how all these thoughts demarcated the subordination and oppression of women, the thoughts and practices of the so-called fathers of the church.

The thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas is profuse and helps to strengthen even more the already existing constructions about the body and sexuality. At first, Saint Thomas considers that the creation of woman is problematic, as Aristotle put it, "She is a misbegotten male". In addition, Schott comments that this is so "because she is naturally subjected to man and the cause of sin"(Schott, 2003, 42). This adherence to Aristotle's thought is clearly seen when he states, "If God's creation is perfect in its totality, it is an enigma for Thomas how a defective being such as woman could have been made in the first production of things. There must be a positive value in woman's existence that justifies her place in the first production of things. And in answer to this, Thomas claims that woman's role is biological procreation, and this is what justifies her creation" (Schott, 2003,43).

These conceptions were developed to the point of thinking that men's work and functions are the ones which require strength, power and reason and that those of women's are procreation and the ones deriving from it. Saint Thomas explains this well when he states, "the active power found in the male sex not only contributes to procreation, but it is also oriented to the vital operation of reason, in this sense, man possesses the active power and the woman possesses the passive power in the role of

procreation” (43). This helps us understand the myths constructed around the enjoyment of sexuality, which man controlled and determined, together with the reproductive function, in which woman was only a passive object in the relationship.

Saint Thomas will strengthen the idea that man is suitable for all the activities requiring the use of reason, since it is man who has played that role since the beginning of human existence. This presupposes that God is the beginning of everything, man was created in His image and he is the beginning of creation. This statement makes us think that man possesses all the perfect attributes and hence, the full exercise of reason. However, this thought does not encompass woman, since her job is procreation. Although the thinker does not visualise the full exercise of reason in women, he does talk about woman’s deficiency, which “...is manifested in her greater affinity with the passions than men have and in her weaker affinity with reason” (Schott, 2003, 45). All these conceptions grew stronger in the idea that man and woman are created in God’s image but they reaffirm that the image of God is found in man, and not in woman: for man is the beginning and end of woman. (46) Another idea very close to this is, “control over passions must be exerted and pleasure restrained so that knowledge can be achieved” (55). This way, in broad strokes, we get to see how these thoughts have been transmitted throughout history by the patriarchal system and from the patriarchal theology, which has made sexuality a denied and forbidden matter for women, in contrast to men. It seems that the fathers of the church have a different opinion about the development of sexuality in man, which generates a great abyss in the relationships between men and women but also, if we go deeper into the issue of woman’s subordination and marginalisation, it has made her guilty of sin, temptation and the fall of the human race, condemning the body and sexuality as something sinful.

Bearing in mind that we miss many other approaches from the philosophical point of view and from the theology which deals with what the body, sexuality and the woman are, we need to ask ourselves: *why have not the churches moved forward in the construction of an open thought about Sexual and Reproductive Rights, if their roots are in the protestant reformation movement? What has happened?*

By reflecting upon this question, we allow ourselves to revise, at the same time, the messages and practices which have been shared by the church throughout history, which demands great open-mindedness from each of the social groups that integrate our churches; this will lead us to break the paradigms of traditional theology. So, unfortunately, when we reflect upon this, we find that despite the contributions of the reformers regarding the understanding of a new meaning of the church, the human being and society, we realise -according to Schott- that “the Reformation preserved the denigration of the lustful body so pronounced in both Augustine and Aquinas. The writings of Luther and Calvin indicate a continuity between Reformation views and the earlier Catholic concern for purifying the body of sexual desire.”(2003, 59). We can see, perhaps, that although Luther and Calvin suppressed the practice of monastic life, especially regarding celibacy, and encouraged the disuse of convents, this did not result into new conceptions of sex or sexuality, or a new concept of women. In this respect, Luther differentiated between impure chastity, which referred to those in religious orders and pure chastity, where he classified those who chose marriage. Therefore, he encouraged people to marry, labelling marriage as “a remedy against the tendency to lust”; like Augustine and Thomas, Luther also tried to cure us from the disagreeable feeling of lust, but such a cure cannot be found in abstinence” (61).

According to Schott, Calvin agreed that virginity is a “virtue not to be despised, a special gift of God” (62). And, from my point of view, these thoughts continue strengthening the concepts already developed in the Middle Ages which did not benefit sexuality or women’s lives at all. However, Luther and Calvin hold on to the idea that marriage provides with a partial means to avoid lust. “Luther describes marriage as a medicine, a hospital for the sick. Calvin claims that God ordained marriage as a necessary remedy to keep us from plunging into unbridled lust. Thus, sexual desire is seen by the Reformers as a illness or a corruption, which must be cured or covered over. Calvin comments that the lust of the flesh...unless it is kept in order, overflows without measure.”(Schott, 2003, 63).

In this way, the old conceptions became reinforced, as they found in the church an adequate mechanism to teach believers, especially women in different areas of society. It is important to reflect on reformers’ thought, above all, when Calvin censors the natural man, urging him to admit that his desires are a disease. Hence, an invitation is made to fight for purity against the desires that the natural man enjoys.

This, Calvinism embodied a systematic code of conduct that regulated every moment of existence. Through unrelenting discipline, Calvinism sought to reshape both the ‘natural’ man and the world and to eliminate all emotion and sentiment not inspired by religious faith, in order to serve the glory of God.” (65). We notice that all this has serious implications for women, as their chastity can only be achieved by obedience to their husbands. This thought is strengthened by Luther, who claims that just as all children are subject to the authority of God, so all wives are subject to their husband’s authority, which signifies God’s glory. And this conception goes even further, when reformers consider that a husband’s authority over his wife is sacred (65). Thus, they declared that a woman has no mastery over her own body. “God so created her body that she should be with a man and bear and raise children” (66), from which derives the concept that woman’s religious vocation is to care for her children and to be obedient to her husband. All this originated an effort in Protestantism to deny the sensual pleasures of life, to repress desire, sexuality and deny all enjoyment of sexuality to the point of thinking of sexual intercourse solely as a means of reproduction. Such are the ideas which have been taught in the churches, which were picked from the thought of the fathers of the church and that we must begin to deconstruct, so as to visualise sexuality, the body, sensuality, as God’s gifts. We simply have to confirm that what happened in the reformation churches was the reaffirmation of catholic theology, with all its preconceptions and concepts about the body, sexuality and woman as something depraved, sinful and for which we should feel ashamed –especially women.

### **How has the Church taught us what the Bible says about the pleasure, delight and enjoyment of sexuality and about who decides on reproduction?**

When we analyse what the Church has taught about the biblical conceptions of the body, sexuality and the rights of human beings to decide on their reproductive capacity, we find that it has been marked by taboos, prohibitions and conceptions of the body as something bad. These teachings have arisen from the Platonic dichotomy which proposed a separation between the soul and the body. This way, it has been taught that sexuality is dirty and must be repressed, creating categories which have mostly fallen on woman and her body, which is presented as a source of temptation and sin in many of our churches and communities.

Furthermore, if we take a quick glance, we will see that the Old Testament develops the concept of an integral human being in the beginning and, like “many other ancient peoples, the Hebrews attribute the origin of man to God. In the stories about the Creation (Gen 1,1-2, 4<sup>a</sup>, 4b-3,24), man appears as the main work of the Creator” (Imschoot, 1966,336). However, as many of us know, this is not only an idea directly built from the experience of the people from Israel, but this idea can also be found in other cultures like the Babylonian.

Likewise, it is said in the Old Testament that man was created in God’s image, after His likeness and it is also an important fact to consider that “woman, then, like man, is the image of Elohim, so it is true that no Hebrew has ever thought of a female divinity or considered two sexes in the divine. Some think that the image of Elohim implies only dominion over the animals that mankind receives from God” (343). This is, perhaps, the idea whose reflection we can see in Psalm 8, where man and woman, created by God in his image and after his likeness, receive the creation from their Creator so that they administer and take care of it together with Him.

Now, from this perspective, we can dare to say that the Hebrews did not conceive a female divinity because their theological conceptions were based on their monotheist idea stating that “monotheism is the belief that there is only one God, with exclusion of any other divinity” (65). This presupposes the need, within the people, to construct a theology which fitted an imaginary of God completely different from that of other cultures. In this way, I can understand how the Hebrews configured the idea of an only God. A God with attributes and to whom we owe absolute obedience and submission. This idea of God rejects any possibility of women goddesses or women who represent their divinity simply because the monotheistic idea leaves out all polytheistic ideas. These configurations of God sprang within the Jewish context and later helped in the construction of a patriarchal system and, hence, a patriarchal theology.

In this regard, the New Testament has, too, taken the antecedents of Judaism as a referent and it does not escape the sociocultural influences within the Jewish, Greek and Roman contexts. Models of exclusion and denial of the body and sexuality were built and repeated, based on these sociocultural contexts.

That is why today we observe how the old teachings of the fathers of the church and the reformers have been picked up again, beginning by the traditional teachings of the Old Testament and the New Testament, so as to reinforce principles of exclusion and demonising of life, sexuality and woman’s body.

Therefore, when we observe the daily life of the churches we realise that we continue teaching the supremacy of the male and the subordination of woman, supported by the interpretation of the traditional biblical texts, denial of the body and sexuality as God’s act of creation, the use of the body as spoil of war. Today we would need to make a new biblical interpretation in order to make women visible in the biblical texts from a gender perspective. We need to make sexuality visible as well, sexuality as a creative act of God in the biblical texts. In this regard, it is vital to reread them so as to question them from a sociocultural context. For instance, we need to ask ourselves from a new biblical interpretation: Who asked Agar if she wanted to be Abraham’s concubine? Who asked Eve if she would like to be blamed for the fall of man? Who asked Tamar if she wanted to commit incest? Who asked the Levite’s concubine if she wanted to be abused, raped, mutilated and sacrificed to save the guest? Who asked Mary if she wanted to be Jesus’s mother? Who asked Mary Magdalene if

she wanted to be judged as a prostitute without being so? Who asked the Samaritan if she wanted to be called other than her name? The biblical history violated all these women's rights when it decided on their body, when it decided if they wanted to have children, if they wanted to enjoy their sexuality and have pleasure. The biblical history silenced them for the patriarchal tradition to speak and decide for them.

Therefore, the Bible has been used as a source to lay the foundation of conceptions about sexuality inscribed in the area of the forbidden and dangerous. In this way, the Bible and the teaching of the Bible has been used in most cases to legitimise the oppression of women, the rejection of sexuality as a creative act of God and to reaffirm women's guilt for the fall of man, according to the parameters of traditional theology.

### **How can we build a new approach to discuss Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the churches we belong to?**

Deconstruction has to be made from a new interpretation of the Bible, together with the sociocultural realities in each church, from the recognition of diversity as a fact, from the recognition of differences, from the inclusiveness from a gender perspective.

In this regard, Fernando Segovia formulates the need to liberate the Biblical texts so that they can be read from the point of view of the marginalised ones. From this perspective, I think this exercise would allow us, at the same time, to liberate our minds from the ways in which we were explained or taught about sexuality and reproductive rights. That is to say, the liberation from the patriarchal model imposed which not only colonised our territories but our minds as well. This model is internalised in human beings, in the sociocultural system and this is why we do not get to perceive how it continues reproducing itself and how we continue learning, e.g. the concepts about sexuality. We need to think of a new approach to these issues that allows us to discuss Culture and stereotypes, and discuss sexism -incarnated in a male chauvinistic culture which allows their pleasure and justifies woman's subordination by considering her weak, inferior and an object in the couple relationship, that justifies "dominion of patriarchal culture, superiority of the male, thus stating that God is above all human beings like men are above all women" (Bernabé, 1998, 93). By revising culture, we will be able to change our paradigm and this will not only help us to break with the old ideas but also with the "dichotomy nature-culture"(94). This dichotomy has come to us from culture, sustaining the idea of woman's natural subordination to man and hence, denial of the thinking human being who can decide on her own body.

Another aspect to be revised is the violence found throughout the Bible. Among its many forms, sacrificial violence in its different manifestations. Cruel sacrifices are held by burning bodies, usually animal bodies. Non-cruel sacrifices are more varied and not always easy to grasp and assess. Many have to do with the body and manifest through corporality. We will refer to the sacrifice of the female body with two examples from the text which neither exhaust the topic, nor represent all the biblical sacrificial diversity on women's bodies, generally through the idea of femininity as opposed to masculinity, in the context of patriarchy.

We need to deconstruct myths: Myths are present in patriarchal societies and come to life through the Church and the family; in many cases, women are the best reproducers of the patriarchal system since it is so subtle and malevolent that it is not possible for us to perceive how and how long we have learned what our body is, what

sexuality is, and who is the one who can define the production. So, one of the myths we must reconstruct is:

- Intercourse is not to make love: To make love includes the full enjoyment of sexuality, in which there must be recognition of the body as a creation of God and full respect towards human beings as persons created with dignity. In addition, we need to break with the false belief that when we talk about sex we are talking about sexuality. Sexuality is more than a vagina and a penis: sexuality has to be regarded as a full manifestation of all our senses, which are part of our body and our human sexuality. From this point of view, sex is a part of the enjoyment of sexuality.
- Man is the one who takes the initiative: This conception derives, logically, from the days of the fathers of the church and it was assimilated by the reformers when they justified woman's subordination; it was thought that woman had been created for reproduction and should be under man's absolute domination.
- Woman is responsible for the temptation and fall of man: We need to break with the traditional paradigms which have generated a historical guilt upon women, blaming them for the fall of man. The churches of reformed tradition need to envisage new theological paradigms which break with the catholic paradigms where the idea that the fall of man was caused by woman are deconstructed.
- Reinterpret the traditional biblical texts which have been used to explain or teach about sexuality. These have been read and interpreted in the church and the family from a patriarchal point of view to maintain oppression and place a heavy burden of guilt and sin upon the woman. Texts from which the Bible has been used as an instrument of domination over women.
- To read the biblical texts from a culture perspective. This exercise will allow the deconstruction of such concepts as gender, stereotypes and male chauvinistic and sexist concepts.
- We need to reread the metaphors which legitimise violence against women and present women as prostitutes, which show women's bodies as source of evil and sin; therefore, something sinful and unrestrained which must be repressed and hidden (Oseas 2:1-13, Jeremiah 3:3-10, 13:25-27, Ezekiel 16: 15-22). Revise texts like: Zachariah 5:5-11. In this respect, it is important to reinterpret them as Weems states, to revise these metaphors will help us understand how the Hebrew society used the metaphors about woman's image in the most favourable way to re-create the political society of the times of the prophets, with all its problematic social issues. This helped to legitimise proposals of oppression towards the woman, accusing her of bad behaviour. This reinterpretation has to be made from a gender perspective and the recognition of those social groups who are vulnerable in our society.
- Demystification of Song of Solomon: Traditional theology has always shown us that this book is the beautiful teaching of the union between God and His people. This interpretation has nothing to do with the aim or purpose of the book. The Song of Solomon, written in the style of Hebraic poem or rhythm recovers the meaning of love in a couple, of the pleasure and enjoyment of sexuality and a new conception of the body, not only that of the woman, but of the man as well. Only by reading chapter 4 with new eyes do we feel how the text invites us to redefine sexuality and the meaning of love in a couple relationship.

## Challenges

This process of construction requires the political will of the governing bodies of the church to include the issue in the agendas of its public discussions, as well as in congregations and communities, where the issue is taken to the spaces of political decision, so that it creates a new position of the Church as regards Sexual and Reproductive rights. It also requires that the issue is intentionally included on a cross-cutting basis in all areas and approaches of the mission, so that it allows dialogue, an interpretation of the biblical texts that considers the different social groups in a social reality, real action to eliminate the violence which is exerted from the church and inclusion from a gender perspective.

We need to feel that the church is going through a new time and this requires an ethical and liberating approach of sexuality: to seek inspiration in the bible and question those conceptions which relate the experience of sexuality to sin and guilt. This reconstruction of the experiences of sexuality releases the bodies, especially those of women's and places them in leading roles in other areas.

To understand sexuality from a liberating perspective is to conceive it as a gift of God, a divine blessing whose divine dwelling is the body and is experienced as a breath of the Spirit which must be treated with dignity and respect. Some biblical texts may be enlightening when it comes to finding new perspectives that address sexuality in an integral way.

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- Sexual and Reproductive Rights are human rights and they should be considered as such. These are dynamic, extensive and completely related, such as equality, equity and dignity. These groups of rights are: 1. The Right to Life, to liberty, to survival, to security and to a free-risk sexuality, 2. The Right to reproductive self-determination, to free choice maternity and protection in case of pregnancy, 3. The Right to information, to education and decision-making, 4. The Right to health care, to health protection and the benefits of scientific progress, 5. The right not to be discriminated and to due respect regardless of differences (Taken: Guide for prevention of HIV/AIDS, Trans Women. Published by UNFPA, Bogota 2011, pp.23-24)

## D. THE RIGHT TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN AND WHEN TO HAVE THEM: ENSURING THAT ALL PERSONS HAVE ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTIVE METHODS

Biblical-theological contributions

*Rev. César Moya*

CLAI Consultation about Sexual and Reproductive Rights. Quito, June 15th, 2012

Our challenge, on approaching the Bible, lies on reading texts which were written over two thousand years ago for some specific contexts, with a specific intention from its authors and for some particular readerships, and to skip forwards to our days to try to understand them in different contexts –with similarities, though–, with different readerships and our impossibility to ask the authors what their intention was. Therefore, a biblical approach to this issue of “the right to decide whether or not to have children and when to have them”, from the CLAI continental consultation on “Sexual and Reproductive Rights” cannot disregard such a challenge. However, this does not mean that our approach to the text from our perspective and from our context is invalid. Every time we approach a biblical text, this text has a new meaning in our lives. In other words, despite the passing of time and different contexts, the text is an inexhaustible source of meaning, which reaches its climax when we apply it.

In view of the above, the texts which tell us about the right to decide whether or not to have children and when to have them should be subject to such considerations. Furthermore, in order to understand the reading of the texts that we have chosen so as to enlighten this consultation, we need to get closer to the world in which these texts originated.

### **Engendering sons and daughters in the biblical world**

In the ancient Orient, the image of a womb accompanied every person from birth to death. We notice this when we see the position in which people were placed when buried: their head was placed over an omega-shaped symbol, a reminder of the

maternal womb. This confirms the importance that the womb had in the anthropology of the Old Testament “*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there*” (Job 1:21). This way, to the Israelite culture, the maternal womb is a work of God and belongs to God Himself. In this regard, the womb’s fecundity or fertility comes from God. An instance of this is Rachel’s and Jacob’s story. Upon their impossibility to bear children, Jacob says “*Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?*” (Gn 30:2).

Despite this trust in God as the creator of life in the womb and as the one who receives that life at the end of our days, also shaped as a womb, the process of fertilisation and conception was a mystery for those in the Ancient Orient, although they did relate the conception of life with the contact between semen and the female womb. Job expresses the following “*Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese?*” (Job 10:10), as an analogy of the seminal fluid and the transformation into an embryo.

In the Old Testament, sons and daughters are considered gifts –presents- from God. It was thought that having numerous offspring was a promise and a blessing from God to a person (Gn 1:28; 12:2). Also, maternity was regarded as a divine grace and as a sacramental image. However, such considerations of the divine blessing are related to the emergence of patriarchy, since the conception of a new life grants an even greater power and acknowledgement to man. Thus, male-ruled political and religious institutions, whose interest is to control women’s creative power, are created.

The decision to have children was determined by the woman’s need to participate in agricultural activities or other activities related with the subsistence of the family or the clan. This shows in the different ages of the children. The energy that social and economic activities demanded was taken from the time which would be spent, otherwise, taking care, protecting and nourishing children. This is confirmed in the origins of Israel, where both men and women were involved in the work for their sustenance, including farming. Besides, the origins of Israel are also linked to a population lessened by wars, epidemics and famine. Consequently, women and children were involved in the livelihood activities. This situation made all the sexual energy canalise into procreation, which is evidenced by the religious sanctions which motivated procreation as well as overcoming sterility “*Be fruitful and multiply...*” (Gn 1:28), “*... I will bless (Sarah) and she shall give rise to nations...*” (Gn 17:16). In this way, procreation was fundamental in the struggle for survival. In contrast to that, other societies like the Mesopotamian or Babylonian had an overpopulation problem, so a way to face that situation was to use mythology to convey the acceptance of abortions, denial of sex for women and even the permission for child mortality.

### **The misfortune of not having children**

Not being a wife or a mother was regarded as a dishonour and a curse for most women from generation to generation. The shame and disgrace of not having children marked women for life. Some of the stories which reflect this are: Abram, who goes in to Hagar, the slave, to have the child that Sarai, his wife, could not give him. According to Sarai, once that Hagar saw that she had conceived from Abram, she looked on her with contempt (Gn 16:4-5); Rachel, who saw that she bore no children, envied her sister and told Jacob to give her children (Gn 30:1-2); Hannah’s womb was closed and could not have children. Her rival, Peninnah provoked and irritated her (1 S. 1:4-7); and also, Jephthah’s daughter execution for not having had children in her life (Jgs. 11:37).

## Birth control

On reading the biblical text we confirm that women in ancient Israel knew about fertility, as well as about birth control, due to the reproductive role provided to them by society. An instance of this is the mention of fruits such as the mandrake, which stimulates fertility in the story of Rachel and Leah, Gn 30. This demonstrates a wish to have children, although this was, of course, influenced by the patriarchal context. Practices for avoiding conception were also well-known. An example is found in Song of Songs 4:5-5-1. There is a group of several plants, herbs, fruits, essences and seeds which stimulated desire and improved fertility. Plants and essences like pomegranates, myrrh, cinnamon, calamus or wine were well known as stimulating, abortive or contraceptive substances. We should make it clear that the text of Song of Songs emphasises the experience of sexuality but not conception or pregnancy. These practices, either for or against pregnancy show the will to decide whether to have or not have offspring –if not permanently, at least for a time.

## About abortion

The biblical text does not speak in favour or against abortion. Besides, there is very little explicit evidence on the issue, or whether it was a widespread practice in ancient Orient. This means that the issue seemed to be of little relevance in the context of the time. This is shown in the prescriptions given to the people of Israel by the Law of Moses, where despite the regulations concerning the defence of life, abortion is not mentioned. And, according to biblical research, the interruption of pregnancy was not considered as a crime against the life of the foetus.

Among the few passages where the term abortion (*nefel*) appears are Psalm 38 and Job 3. It is mentioned there as something not desirable. But there are two texts where it is mentioned in a very definite way: Ex. 21:22-24 and Nm 5:11-31. However, the practice of abortion is in the background and the focus is strengthening the patriarchal power. In the case of Ex 21, the harm to the foetus is regarded as an offence to the man, to the child's father. What is valuable is the father's life and not the foetus's. That is why compensatory damages must be paid to indemnify the father for the loss of property: the foetus. And when the woman's life was at risk due to violence, the maximum penalty would be applied, in a context of protection of life.

In the text in Numbers there is an interrogation to a woman accused of adultery by her own husband, victim of jealousy; the woman is brought to the religious representative's altar. The text does not talk specifically about abortion, but it uses metaphors such as "make your womb discharge" and "your uterus drop", terms which seem closer to *nefel* (*nafal*). The bitter water given by the priest for the woman to drink, which will make her sterile in case of infidelity, may be associated with bitter teas which were well-known as abortive substances. In this regard, a woman's womb is a space of male domination and religious power. However, the woman in this text has considerable decision-making power as well as influence on society. The investigation in the text shows that she was stepping out of the norms established by the patriarchal society and beginning to decide for herself.

## Levirate

The term "levirate" derives from the Latin *levir*, which means "brother-in-law". The Hebrew term is *yâbâm*. This law (Dt. 25:5-10) stated that the brother-in-law must marry his brother's widow, when he had died without having any sons. The son born to that couple would succeed to the name of the deceased brother and preserve the family. This way, in a patriarchal society where hierarchy is transmitted through male

lineage, the widow is incorporated to the family for the fruit of her womb. Such was the tragedy of becoming a widow without a son, that on her brother-in-law's refusal to fulfil the law, she would "*pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face...*" (Dt 25:9). That is, without a son there was no future for women –or for the patriarchal system.

What surprises us the most about this law is the intervention of the old men in the city at the widow's desperate attitude; in a male world, marked by the culture of honour and shame, a woman repudiates and slanders a man in public. The authorities intervene since they are deeply concerned on behalf of the patriarchal society, in the interests of preserving her family and her inheritance. But, contrary to what might seem a favourable law to the widow by integrating her into the family, the real purpose was to shut her away and control her body. In this way, the system kept the control of her reproduction. Evidence of this is found in the examination and control of her menstruation and pregnancy (Dt 21:10-13).

### **Procreation in the Greco-Roman culture**

In Roman society, home and marriage reproduced the structure of the State. When there were no slaves, it was simply a family. When there were slaves, it was a home. Several homes formed a village. And several villages formed a city-state. In this hierarchical organisation, the father governs over the children like a king and the husband exerts a republican government over the wife. This is what is called a patriarchal home structure, with the *pater familias* at the head of it. A woman could get to govern a home only when she was heir to a fortune.

A city-state needed soldiers and citizens. Such was the need that Augustus introduced a severe marriage legislation so as to reinforce the traditional Roman family. To procreate became a civic duty, in such a way that the Law harshly sanctioned those who stayed single, carried out census or inspections in order to avoid celibacy, obliged women to marry between 12 and 15 years old and those who became widowed to marry in less than a month. Moreover, Roman Laws guaranteed emancipation from patriarchal tuition to all free women with over three children and freedwomen—those who had been slaves- with over four children. Only those over 50 were allowed to stay single. In this context, virginity was unknown. Rather, chastity was a privilege, but not a right. As for women, chastity was necessary to assure the children's identity and save the father's right over them. That is why female infidelity was one of the most severely punished crimes. The only instance in which Romans admired prolonged celibacy in women was in the case of widows who remain faithful to the memory of their first husband.

As for the offspring, the family in Greco-Roman culture valued sons and regretted having daughters. This value gave the father rights over his children's lives. At the time of birth, the mother presented the newly-born child to the father, who might accept or abandon him/her in the outskirts of the city. In this way, they were exposed to death out in the open, or to be adopted by other families, or to be taken by merchants who turned them into slaves. For every boy that was exposed to death, there were four girls.

The Christian movement developed in this contextual situation. Because of that, conversion meant to go against the flow and hence, to undergo changes in social relations. This way, when someone embraced Christianity, especially a man, he was denied all his privileges based on his sexual identity as a man. Hebrews had to abandon the privilege of being the people chosen by God. Masters had to renounce to their power over

slaves and husbands to their power over wives and children. This was a true social revolution in that context, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:27-28). This resulted in a discipleship of equals between men and women, and gave the latter the possibility to define themselves freely concerning marriage.

### **Maternity and the Greco-Roman culture**

In the New Testament we find a controversial text for Christianity, especially for Protestantism; salvation through maternity. In other words, salvation through works; in this case, by conceiving children (1 Ti. 2:11-15).

There are many clarifications to make about the composition of the text in 1 Ti. 2:11-15, e.g. the influence of Greco-Roman culture in the first Christian communities, in this specific case, Ephesus. There, as in the rest of the Roman Empire, Greco-Roman customs still prevailed. Everything outside the stereotype was considered as suspicious and transgressive of the established order. Both men's and women's ethics were determined, to a great extent, by codes of honour and shame, in such a way that men were programmed to lead a public life –politics and studies were part of it- while women were programmed for private life, which included procreation and the care of children. In addition to this, there was the law of Patronage, i.e. the relationship between the patronus and the client, in which the clientes had obligations towards the patroni, in exchange for favours from them. This particular way of understanding men's and women's roles also penetrated in the church. And, according to commentators, as long as the church respected what was established in the Roman patriarchal society, it was able to bring the good news and grow.

In this way, we must understand the text in 1 Tim. as a prescriptive text, instead of a descriptive one, i.e. a text which mentions what the author of the letter wishes that is done in the church, but it does not tell what happens in the church. All which is prescribed there goes against those who act in a different way. Actually, there were women –most certainly in a favourable position- who were teaching and choosing not to marry. But this attitude relates to the influence of a charismatic group which appeared in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Montanists, led by Montano, who shared his leadership with two prophetesses and gave great importance to women, up to the point that they could become bishops and leaders. Besides, they followed what Galatians said “...in Christ...there is no longer male and female...” (Gal 3:28). This leadership by women made the patriarchal system deeply worried.

Furthermore, we bear in mind that the pastoral letters are addressed to the communities in Asia Minor, where there were several cults to divinities, especially to the goddess Artemis, worshipped for her attributes as Goddess-Mother. She was regarded as the divinity of fecundity, the goddess patron and protector of labour and women in labour, the goddess of life, the guardian of small and newly-born children and young brides-to-be. It seems that this situation contributed to the construction of the myth of the virgin-mother, as Mary is regarded -in the Catholic church-, named by the Council of Ephesus in 431 as the “Mother of God”.

### **Conclusions and challenges**

The biblical texts were written within a patriarchal context and, as such, they respond to a male-dominated culture, where the man controlled the decisions on whether or not to have children. Woman and her womb were considered man's property, so any

action against their life was considered a crime against his property. The punishment against adultery or fetal loss had, hence, no positive or negative moral value.

Man's right to decide whether or not to have offspring was granted by the laws established by the very patriarchal system. Although these laws seemed to defend life, they did not promote freedom of conscience.

Despite the many laws which favoured the patriarchal system and abused women, many acts of resistance by women are mentioned in the biblical texts, from strategies of seduction in order to get pregnant, to contraceptive methods or acts of disobedience so as to achieve emancipation.

The sexual and reproductive practices described in the biblical text have been conditioned not only by social and political aspects, but also by the religious one. Not to have children meant to be deprived from God's blessing and rejected by a society marked by the patriarchal system.

On seeking and building an equalitarian society, we must recognise that although some biblical texts cannot be regarded as liberating for women –since the accounts of Sexual and Reproductive Rights are mentioned negatively– they do warn us of the dangers or the consequences of following laws which promote exclusion of and discrimination against women.

The biblical texts identified on the topic “the right to decide whether or not to have children...” are closely related to other rights, such as abortion and state policies about birth control.

The aspects identified in the biblical texts about “the right to decide whether or not to have children...” continue to happen in our societies and their respective contexts, still patriarchal and male-centred. And the churches do not escape these contexts, above all those which impose moral laws about sexuality and procreation. However, in each context, as in the biblical texts, there are acts of resistance by those who want to make this right respected and valued, especially women.

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## E. HUMAN BEING, IMAGE OF GOD

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Texts: Psalm 8- Genesis 1

How was *the image of God* interpreted?

Exegetical elements

Hermeneutics

1. Unique dignity
2. Creation of identity
3. Representation of God on Earth
4. Sovereignty and capacity to decide
5. The unity of humankind
6. The right and the duty to be informed
7. Gender justice
8. An anti-idolatrous concept
9. An anti-imperialist concept
10. The restoration of the whole image of God by Jesus Christ

### **Psalm 8**

225 years ago the German philosopher Kant wrote in his work *Critique of Practical Reason*:

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me”.

Psalm 8,3-9 said something similar 2500 years ago,

<sup>3</sup>When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, <sup>4</sup>what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? <sup>5</sup>Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour. <sup>6</sup>You have given them dominion over the work of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, <sup>7</sup>all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, <sup>8</sup>the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. <sup>9</sup>O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth”

It is the best commentary in the bible about the dignity of the human being as image of God. But, unlike Kant, the Psalmist expresses his admiration to the great work of God and the dignity that the Lord gave to the human being and he does it in a tone of praise.

The best starting point for our reflection is, then, the praise to the Creator. On this basis, let us proceed with the fundamental texts which tell us about the human being as image of God.

### **Genesis 1**

Everything starts at Genesis 1,26-27:

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them."*

Before going into the intricate world of biblical analysis, I think it is important to emphasise a very surprising thing and then, we will make a brief review of the ways in which the statement that we "were *created in the image of God*" has been interpreted.

It is true that it is a fundamental biblical statement to understand what the human being is; but the surprising fact is that there are only three texts in the Hebrew Bible which mention this character. Besides the first account of the creation, there is a very brief reference in Genesis 5,1: *When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God*; and another in Genesis 9,6: *Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind*. There are no other statements in the Hebrew bible about the character of image of God that the human being has.

Since it is a concept which all the Churches have considered fundamental for anthropology, it strikes us that there are so few mentions.

The text from Psalm 8 which has already been presented is an interpretative praise of this statement, hence not a new statement.

In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the concept is resumed in two texts added to the Index of the Hebrew version:

*Wisdom 2,23: ...for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity.*

*Ecclesiasticus 17,3: And made them according to his image.*

Both texts emphasise that the image has to do with dominion.

### **How was the image of God interpreted?**

The concept, certainly striking, of a human being *created in the image and likeness of God* has been the interest and concern of many people throughout the history of Bible interpretation. Genesis 1,26 is a singular text, even separate in the Bible, that is why it became a subject of much speculation. We find countless concepts, supposedly contained in the statement of the image of God: intelligence, soul, communication, language, to hear God and talk to him (predisposition towards religion, Riedel),

to be social, *man and woman*, and even some interpretations which one might find amusing: the image refers to *humour*, since animals lack this, or to walk upright, as the only living being doing so (Humbert, Köhler). Evidently, the creators of such statements never saw a crane or knew about the *Tyrannosaurus Rex*.

For both, Catholic and Evangelical theology, the doctrine of the image of God has always been a fundamental part of theological anthropology. Having said that, opinions differ greatly when it comes to defining with precision what that image consists of.

The greatest difficulty arose when they tried to link this doctrine of the image of God with the biblical teaching about the fall or sin that encompasses all humankind; that is, how did sin affect the image of God that humankind have?

This is no problem in Genesis 9,6, since the text makes it clear that *whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind*.

This shows that, according to the biblical author, the image of God persisted after the fall described in Genesis 3.

The Pre-Rabbinic interpretation construed the image of God as the knowledge of good and evil, as well as the ability to make ethical decisions and lead a life according to the order of God. Therefore, man must be responsible for their acts in the final judgment. Besides, the image is a special heritage from Israel.

In Hellenistic Judaism, mostly in Alexandria and especially in the book Wisdom of Solomon (Deuterocanonical/Apocrypha), this ethical interpretation combined with the Greek concept of the immortal soul. The image is that immortality.

Rabbinic literature interpreted the image as the effort of man to adjust his actions to God, i.e. the capability for ethical actions.

Philo of Alexandria, the Hellenistic Jewish, made an important distinction between *image and likeness*. Likeness is the perfection of image and image is the one of the soul.

Irenaeus of Lyon, the Church Father, understood that man holds the image but has lost the likeness. Image is an imperfect similitude, while the gifts of grace were the likeness that has been lost. This was maintained by Patristics, by and large.

In Oriental theology, image referred to the natural and supernatural gifts as capabilities to act according their status of sons and daughters of God.

Following the Aristotelian tradition, in the late Middle Ages the image was linked to intellect or rational soul. In this way, a new spiritual dimension was added to the concept. To Saint Thomas Aquinas, the image is the guiding thread to moral, since, thanks to it, man has free will.

Humanism during the Renaissance interpreted the image as the special dignity of man. God placed him as the centre of the world and man can organise it on account of his/her free will. In all his/her being, man reflects the Creator. This line of thought served as theological basis for the dignity of the human being.

Martin Luther, the Reformer, talked about the “weakening” of man after the fall, due to which he cannot realise the image without the help of the mediator, Jesus Christ.

Melanchton and Calvin considered that man still keeps traces of the image, which show in his intellectual capabilities, making him different from animals.

In general, Protestantism considers that the image was corrupted by the fall.

German idealism developed a dynamic concept of the image, its meaning being “to become like” God, to ascend one more rung on the ladder, towards the goal of the whole image. This is linked to the idea of perfectibility of the human nature.

In more recent times, secularisation diminished the importance of the concept of human being as the image of God. Christian anthropology stopped giving a substantial form to the individual’s identity.

The German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach criticised the concept radically and thought that the issue is precisely the other way round: man creates a god in his image.

Karl Barth, the Swiss reformed theologian, defined humankind’s relationship with God based on the relationships with their neighbours. This relational structure does not compare two different ways of being. Rather, it is about two relations. The image consists of, hence, a relation.

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer identified the image with the liberty of humankind. Yet, this liberty is not an ontological quality but a relation and the quality of being free for God and for the other persons, as established by Jesus Christ.

The II Vatican council (1962-1965) wished to elaborate on a positive image of humankind. Thus, they used the concept of the image as a basis of human dignity and human rights and stated that the image entitles humankind to take responsibility for the social existence and know and love God. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (# 355-357), to have been created in the image of God implies the ability of self-knowledge, of freely giving oneself and entering into communion with God and other persons.

Ecological awareness was very critical of the concept of man’s lordship over nature. Since it was closely related to the concept of the image, this idea was affected too. In 1967, Lynn Townsend White tried to identify the cause of the exploitation of nature in the roots of Christian anthropology, declaring it as “anthropocentrism”.

The biblical exegesis replied that this is due to a misinterpretation of the text in Genesis, which does not aim to relentless exploitation of nature, but to commit to a responsible stewardship, consisting in tilling and keeping it (Génesis 2,15).

After this brief review of different lines of interpretation, it is time to devote ourselves to read and investigate the biblical text in depth.

### **Exegetical elements**

In the classic from Genesis 1,26-27 we find the Hebrew nouns *zélem* and *demut*, usually translated as *image* and *likeness*, respectively.

*Zélem* is a specific, physical representation; *picture, image, figure, statue, effigy, statuary, idol*. It seems to have derived from the verb *zalam*, meaning *cut down, carve, cut, sculpt*.

In Genesis 1 and 9, the term is used to qualify the human being; in Genesis 5,3, to talk about the son's resemblance to the father.

*Demut* means *likeness, equality, similarity; model, form, figure*; although it is commonly used as an expression of the form and the exterior.

Both terms are very similar and interchangeable by the use of the two Hebrew prepositions *b<sup>e</sup> y k<sup>e</sup>*: in Genesis 5,1-3 first appears likeness; and then it is said that Adam had a son in his likeness, according to his image. The prepositions do not mean "according to", but "to" and "like"; and it must not be translated as "according to our image", but "in our image". We must avoid by all means is the translation as a *portrait*. Or, in modern terms, "photography"; or even worse, "hologram".

Both terms aim at a comparison. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to systematise the doctrine which appears in Genesis 1,26-27.

One detail that has always attracted readers' attention is that God speaks in plural: *Let us make humankind in our image...*

Three possibilities are usually offered to explain this:

1. The celestial court of angels and celestial beings are included;
2. It is a plural referring to his majesty;
3. It is a plural of deliberation, a turn of phrase for "self convening".

The repetition of in the *image of God he created them* is quite striking. Some interpret that, here, the word *Elohim* means *divine* or *celestial beings*, i.e. angels.

The concept is not separate, but in a context of dominion over creation. Just as the image of God, human being has one or several functions on Earth.

This function is presented through the use of the verbs have dominion (govern) (*rdh*) and subdue (*kbsb*). These verbs indicate that humankind is sovereign, the "monarch" of creation. Psalm 8 expresses the same: *You have given them dominion, you have put all things under their feet*.

Both texts, Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 express that the image of God and the function of governance are intimately related.

To broaden the interpretation, it is necessary to verify the use of the concept in the cultures around Israel.

In Akkadian texts it is said that the king is the image of God. The oldest account dates back to 1200 b.c. It is a hymn of victory dedicated to Tukulti-Ninurta I, which describes the king as *a permanent image of Enlil*.

In the Akkadian language, the oldest in the Semitic family, *zalmu* means statue of a god or a king, statue in general, figure, relief, drawing, cult figure; and in a metaphorical sense, constellation, representation.

In Epic of *Gilgamesh*, the creation of man, *Énkidu*, is performed in the following way: the goddess mother *Aruru* forms in her heart the image of the god Anu and then draws it in clay. The being created is, hence, a copy or an image of a divinity.

In Ancient Egypt the king is described as the son and also the image of God. The terms used may designate statues of kings in temples, statues for processions, statues of private persons, as well as those for tombs. The person represented by the statue is present in the place where the figure is. A statue of Ramses II in Nubia bears the inscription: “The living image of the king in the country of Nubia”. This means that the king is present in Nubia, although he is not physically there.

This shifts to the relation of the king with the god: although the god is not physically present, he is present through his image, which is the king. God is present on earth in the king, or through him.

The purpose of this character consists of the king’s exercise of dominion on earth.

Oriental kings placed a statue of their image in their provinces to determine, therefore, that their sovereignty reached that place.

A few Oriental texts talk about the creation of the humankind in the image of the divinity; but it is mostly declared that the king is the image of the divinity. This is very frequent in Egypt, where the issues of sovereignty and dominion are referred to, but always in relation to the pharaoh.

The environment shows, therefore, that the concept of humankind as image of God is related in its origins with the ideas of Ancient Orient about the king as a son of God on earth.

## **Hermeneutics**

Having established the importance of the concept of human being as image of God, let us study the consequences of this remarkable statement.

### **1. UNIQUE DIGNITY**

What is stated about humankind in Genesis 1 and 5 and Psalm 8 is not stated about other beings, even when the account in Genesis 1 establishes a series of differences between the created things and beings. God even blesses sea animals and birds and commands them to multiply; but nothing compares a human being in his/her constitution as image of God and his/her functions. Even more: sun and moon, Oriental divinities, are mere lamps which must shed light and serve to measure the time so that celebrations to God can be held correctly. In this way, they also serve humankind.

Contrary to all the later Greek divisions of the human being into body (inferior, temporary, lower) and soul (spiritual, superior, eternal), the account in Genesis talks about *human being*, man and woman –and nothing else. Dignity does not lie in the soul or spirit; but nor does it in the physical glory (such as the “gods” and “goddesses” of cinema, music or sport), but in the fact of being a creature in the image of God.

Génesis 2 speaks of the formation of man from dust of the ground and the breath of life which transforms him into a living being. There is not a dualist vision here either, but rather one of unity of the human being.

This being is autonomous and whole. It cannot be reduced to a half, to an instrument, to an animal, a machine, an object. He/she has his/her dignity in himself, herself.

The proximity of humankind to Earth and its origin in God are images which take us back to its temporary and, at the same time, sublime character; to mortality; to life; to the limits of its existence and its divine mission. That is how it is perceived by diverse texts, such as Job 34, 14-15; Psalm 103,14-17 and 104,29. This realism warns about falling into pride, self-glory or false superiority.

The dignity of humankind is also expressed as the culmination in the process of creation, the last work, both in Genesis 1 and in the account of Genesis 2. The human being is the only one that is the product of God's explicit "self-invitation" to create.

This content of dignity became the basis of the origin of human rights.

The unique character of each person, their personality and relation to the Creator and the creation are also expressed in this concept. Thus, this teaching is preferentially used as an ecumenical basis for dealing with bioethical issues, e.g. at the level of intervention of biomedicine.

## 2. CREATION OF IDENTITY

Every affirmation of a unique character is the creation of an identity. Identity is a relationship that an entity maintains with itself. It is based on differentiation and it is a procedure which subdivides a whole. This means that an entity can only acquire its identity as part of a whole and, at the same time, by standing out of it. Identity is, then, a dialectical relation between belonging and becoming separate.

The human being has a peculiar identity in relation with God and its surroundings. It belongs to both, but at the same time, is different from both. It is part of creation, but it is unique. Taking this to the final conclusion, we can say that every person is unique.

## 3. REPRESENTATION OF GOD ON EARTH

From the study of the context in Israel and the peculiarity of the biblical statement, the present exegesis understands that such statement does not refer to an "essence" of the human being, but to its function. If we transfer the ideas of the old Oriental ideology about royalty, which held that the king represented the divinity, to the biblical statement, we deduce that humankind's function is to be a representative of God on earth. In addition, the statues of the monarchs represented their sovereignty even in the most remote provinces. If we transfer this to Genesis 1, it implies that the human being as image of God represents God on earth and is a sign of its greatness in this world. He/She is called to maintain and establish God's sovereignty.

We are, therefore, in the presence of a kind of "democratised ideology of monarchy."

This means that the human being is not the owner of the land, and their items and beings but an administrator, a "treasurer", a responsible supervisor. This gives him/her a major role in history.

Unlike the Roman concept, which defines property as *dominion* in the literal sense of the word and establishes a relation between the subject and the possessed object of domination, the biblical concept understands that the world is a *heritage*, a loan to

be used in the correct way; and establishes a relation among all the human persons which participate in it and their social and natural environment and, as well as the responsibility of humankind for the entrusted heritage before the Creator.

There is a nice expression which illustrates this idea in Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 17, 5-13.

This concept gives full value to the human work as the development of God's work. Each person has a calling –not in the sense of a religious profession, but a calling to work and to take responsibility for their place in the world for the benefit of all. The Protestant Reformation takes the credit for having rediscovered the meaning of a non-ministerial calling, the calling of God. This is reflected in the term *Beruf*, in German, profession, which includes *Ruf*, calling or vocation.

This also acknowledges all sciences and does not subdue any of them to something supposedly higher, as was done before by subduing them to theology, later, to philosophy and currently in many branches, to mathematics.

#### 4. SOVEREIGNTY AND ABILITY TO TAKE DECISIONS

Just like the image of God implies a responsibility from the representative towards the Represented, it also implies sovereignty over all the creation. Sovereignty does not mean absence of commitment or, even less, the right to indiscriminate exploitation. It implies that the guidelines to the exercise of sovereignty come from the Represented, and that is how Israel's monotheism understood it by making God's will expressed in the Torah the foundation of its life.

Without getting into complex discussions about the liberty of the humankind and its diverse conditionings due to genetics, education, circumstances and, at a theological level, due to sin, it is fair to say that to be a representative implies the ability to make decisions.

Genesis 2 expounds the issue of liberty: humankind is instructed by God and is free to fulfil it or not. Although the material in this chapter has a different origin from Genesis 1, the editor considered that it was vital to relate both texts and place them in that order, so that the considerations about the image are to be completed with what follows.

In spite of the Reformation's common interpretation of the "corrupted image", the text in the Hebrew Bible does not formulate it in those terms. On the other hand, in Genesis 9,6 it is again stated that man was made in the image of God.

#### 5. UNITY OF THE HUMANKIND

By using the generic term *Adam – human being* – it is shown that Genesis 1 refers to humankind. Later, Adam becomes a personal name, whose son was, as stated in Genesis 5,3, *in his likeness, according to his image*. In Genesis 9,6 the term Adam is used again in a generic way, as a human being and a member of humankind.

It is not an odd, mythological being without a navel who possesses the image of God, but every human being and humankind in its entirety as it is formed by real, flesh and blood human beings. On the basis of the information in Genesis 1, we think that all persons form the unity of the humankind, since they have a common origin which derives from God.

This unity is not only “of origin”, but also due to having an only Saviour.

## 6. THE RIGHT AND THE DUTY TO BE INFORMED

I assume the responsibility for this statement. I have not found it in any commentary.

I maintain that in order to be able to make decisions and be a responsible representative of God on Earth, one must have information transmitted by language, documented in writing and experiences which can in turn reflect into patterns of life and identities. Hence, access to comprehensive education and information about all the issues and aspects of life and the world should not only be an inalienable right of every person but a demand, so that we can realise the plan for us - to be the image of God on Earth.

This right has three roots:

- Israel was an educated and cultured people; at least men should be able to read and write in order to have personal ownership of the Law of Moses. But there is sufficient evidence of learned women as well. Hulda, the prophetess, is an outstanding example; without a doubt, specific units in the texts of Ruth and Songs were written by women.
- It is not the King, or the Pharaoh, but the human being –in this way, in general- who is the image of God. This conveys a democratisation of all rights. Writing and written information are no longer the exclusive right of the high classes, as in Egypt or in Mesopotamia and become the heritage of all people. Without a doubt, this process was also favoured by the relatively easy Hebrew writing, with its reduced set of 22 signs, which can be learned faster than the complex writing of Egyptians (where about 700 hieroglyphs should be known) or the Mesopotamian (with their hundreds of cuneiform signs).
- In Israel there have always been social support groups in which historical, religious and ethical information was passed on: the family; and from the intertestamental period on, the synagogue. This was reflected into Christianity, where the community of faith undertook the same role, as provider of a space for support and transmission of information.

## 7. GENDER JUSTICE

The human being as such, is the image of God, and the Bible conceives human beings as men and women. Both man and woman are, hence, the full image of God and not just man, as certain cultures maintain –or even a specific theological line which claims to be based on 1 Corinthians 11,7, which reads that man *is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man.*

The implications of this radical equality of dignity, full identity, representation of God on Earth, sovereignty, liberty, etc, are vast and place us in front of an immense task as regards gender equality, whose magnitude we can barely fathom. Much has been achieved, but all that is minute before to what is left to be done.

We have a long way to go before we achieve a full communion of love, mutual acceptance, respect, reciprocity, complementarity, justice, joint administration of the Earth, shared decisions and many more things that we can only imagine.

In my opinion, the joint happiness to be the co-creators -so to speak- of new lives is also part of that positive relationship. We cannot ignore that Genesis 1,28 expressly states the mandate of procreation, and the repetition of the phrase in v 27: *In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*, the texts convey that the human being is also the image of God by the ability to procreate.

Please, allow me to share a personal statement: I am grateful to God, for he gave my parents that ability, and I thank him for having given the same ability to my wife and me, as well as to my children. I am aware that the human being, and above all, woman, cannot be reduced to the function of procreation, as it has falsely been held, so I suggest promoting the joy at the privilege of being able to love each other as a couple, to experience that love in all its dimensions, as well as organising and planning family life.

This dimension of planning is intimately related to the right and the duty to be informed.

#### 8. AN ANTI-IDOLATROUS CONCEPT

It is well-known that Hebrew monotheism is a totally anti-idolatrous religion, which does not tolerate any type of idols or images, or the adoration of such representations of divinity. This refers to both two-dimensional representations with pictures and three-dimensional ones with images, figures, statues or reliefs. The classical place to find this prohibition is Exodus 20,4, with a parallel text in Deuteronomy 5,8

With this absolute prohibition of figurative representations of the divinity, Israel was all alone amidst the many cultures around it where such representations were normal and very common.

This prohibition is not capricious iconoclasm, but it responds to several theological premises. To the Hebrew monotheism, which was the result of a long process of revelation and reflection reaching its peak with the spiritualised conception of God, God is irrepresentable; even if we use anthropomorphism in religious language, theology knows that it is just that and nothing else: forms to talk to God, but no author of a biblical text would imagine God with titanic arms, huge fingers, disproportionate eyes or a gigantic mouth.

Besides –but not less important- there is already an image of God on Earth (but which must not be worshipped): the human being. This concept is, hence, anti-idolatrous in itself.

#### 9. AN ANTI-IMPERIALIST CONCEPT

As we have said before, in the old context, the king comes from God, he is the image of God, or is God. The only rare exceptions are found in some non Hebrew text which says that the human being was created according to the image of divinity.

On the other hand, in Genesis 1, the human being as such and as humankind –men and women- is the image of God. In a context of royal and imperial powers, it means a direct attack to the monopoly of the image held by the tip of the pyramid of power. The king is dethroned and must share his sublime, special and unique character with all persons, even the poorest slave and the most ignored little girl in a hut. To assert that every human being is the image of God is a severe blow in the face of the royal and imperial system. It destroys at once and almost in a “casual” statement, all the

ideology of divine origin of the king and his power. This process of dismantlement of the imperial ideology continues in the New Testament with Jesus' answer to the cunning question on whether the tribute to the Caesar must be paid and culminates in the unmasking of the emperor and all his apparatus as beasts in the Apocalypse, together with the ridiculisation of the worshipping of the imperial figure by the masses, which do exactly what the Law prohibits: adoring an idol.

There is tremendous potential in this anti-imperialist nuance of the concept of image of God, since no power on Earth, no structure, no law can ever deny a human being his or her dignity.

#### 10. JESUS CHRIST'S RESTORATION OF THE COMPLETE IMAGE OF GOD

Besides the texts in Genesis, some texts in the New Testament also use the concept of *image of God*, to refer both to the human being, and fundamentally, to Jesus Christ. In Greek, it is *eikôn*, from where derives the Spanish term *ícono*.

The statement in 2 Corinthians 4,4 is of vital importance: *Christ is the perfect image of God*. This also appears in Colossians 1,15 and Hebrews 1,3. Jesus Christ is, hence, the authentic representative of God, his witness, his deputy.

Linking this idea to salvation, Paul states that *for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ*, Romans 8,29. *We are being transformed into the image of the Lord*, 2 Corinthians 3,18; and *you have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator*, Colossians 3,10.

This implies that our salvation includes a sort of restoration; and, more than this, an overcoming the limitations until we transform into a perfect image of God, *and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*, Ephesians 4,24.

Created in the image of God in order to represent God on Earth in our lives and relations and renewed so as to be the perfect image of God: The will for life of God -the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit- reaches its plenitude in Jesus Christ's redemptive work. Amen.

## F. BIBLICAL VISION OF THE HUMAN BODY

*Father Bruno Príncipe Cotos*

National Consultation Peru, 25th August, 2012

Culture, the level of knowledge and development of a people, is characterised by customs, ways of thinking and values, which give the people a sense of identity, which distinguishes it from others. We are born and brought up in a certain culture. The culture where we live conditions our way of thinking and the way we express ourselves. Culture is not static, but it changes in the course of time and varies from one people to another. In order to understand people, we have to understand their customs and the ways of thinking and expressing themselves which characterise them. Likewise, in order to understand a text, we must understand the cultural context where it comes from.

### **1. Two mindsets: Hebrew and Greek**

We run the risk of caricaturing, but the features we will mention –even if sometimes exaggerated– give us an idea of the substantial differences in mindset and hence, the cultural differences in the «biblical world». Although there are remarkable differences, especially in remote times which we associate with the Pentateuch and Prophets, it is also true that from the III century b.C. onwards (Alexander the Great and the dissemination of Hellenism), the Semitic and the Greek mindsets began to be more similar –and not in few aspects. If we exaggerate the following outlines, it is only to impress in our minds the fact that the Biblical texts come from different cultures to ours (European), with its «Aristotelian logic». Even today, there is great difference between the Arab World in the Middle East (not differing that much from the Andean mentality!) and the Western world. A Hebrew is a Mediterranean Semite, whose roots are Oriental (Canaan and Mesopotamian).

The writings of the NT are under the influence, some of them more than others, of that Palestinian mindset and culture, which was, besides, the one of Jesus and his disciples. Although they were written in Greek, they were not fully Greek as regards their ideas or frame of mind. It is true that Paul and other writers adopted Greek expressions and concepts, which are evident in the text; that is, a gradual hellenisation took place. It would be strange if it had not happened, since the communities of Corinth, Ephesus or Colossae were in the Hellenic Asia Minor and others, such

as the community of Thessaloniki, were in Greece. We are influenced by the western mindset, with Greco-Roman roots, with their logic and their abstraction, their mathematical precision and the care for the body, their ethics of virtue and vice, their sense of aesthetics and scenography.

## 2. Mindsets and attitudes

The Greek contemplates and admires the world; the Hebrew looks at it and goes near it, listens to it and talks to it. The Greek says what it is as it is; the Hebrew says what he perceives and how he feels it. To the Greek, the most important of the senses is the sense of sight; to the Hebrew, it is the sense of hearing. That is why Greek art is for being contemplated, Hebrew art is for being experienced. In fact, the Hebrew is mostly a practical person, which shows in their ceramics: they were not interested in their beauty but in their usefulness. Greek ceramics, on the other hand, was characterised by its admirable beauty, far more than by its utility, the product of a mind inclined to contemplation and harmony.

The Greek way of thinking is especially logical, it wonders about the origin of things, of itself and the *raison d'être*. It wonders about essence. That is why philosophy is associated with Greece. The Hebrew, on the other hand, wonders what things do and is especially practical and relational. Knowledge, to a Greek, means to define realities, while it means to interact with them, to a Hebrew. Truth is intellectual to a Greek, it is discussed, it is deduced; to a Hebrew, truth is relational, it «is done» (Jn 3,21). The Greek seeks objectivity and exactitude while subjectivity and emotion predominate in the Hebrew. The Greek seeks to understand things, the Hebrew seeks their significance. Each of them wrote «history» according to these frames of mind and that is why we find it so difficult to understand the biblical texts.

The Greek analyses, wants to understand, define, systematise; they aim at perfection in the forms and in conduct, they seek harmony. The Hebrew mentality is put into motion by action; it is dynamic and eminently relational. It does not seek to know the world as much as to dominate it. That is why Paul observed, in relation to the gospel of the Cross «for Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom» (1 Cor. 1,22).

The Hebrew tends to exaggerate, and much, unlike the Greek, who sticks to the facts and seeks objectivity. Thus, the statement «This is the length of Abraham's life, one hundred and seventy-five years» (Gn 25,7), or that Methuselah lived «nine hundred and sixty-nine years» (Gn 5,27), means in Semitic that they were men blessed by God because life is a gift of God, not that they lived, literally, so many years. When we read Jesus' warning: «Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother...» (Lk 14,26), we must understand that it is not about hating, but loving less, as we precisely read in Matthew's parallel text, 10,37. When Jesus says «I have come to call not the righteous but sinners» (Mc 2,17), we must understand that it is not about exclusions, but about priorities.

The mindset differences are particularly observed in language as such, since it is the clearest reflection of the mental structure and the temperament of those who created and use such language. It is the clearest expression of the way each one of us stands in front of the world, where our attention is focused and what our priorities are. Hence, in Greek, the most important element is the noun (objectifying); in Hebrew it is the verb (action). This corresponds to their mindset: one focuses on things per se and their essence, the other focuses on things to me and what they do. Greek aims at

communicating reality or the idea being discussed with more precision; that is why it is so clear in its nuances, its distinctions, rich in words and adjectives. Hebrew, which is poor in words, builds its nouns from verb roots, since the meaning of things depends on what they do and how they relate to the person. It comes to no surprise: the Greek leans towards contemplation, the Hebrew towards action. The Greek talks about what is processed by reason and ideas, the Hebrew talks about what is felt, through emotions and feelings.

To the Hebrew, language is an instrument of communication and as such, he is not concerned about linguistic or grammatical details. In fact, Hebrew is extremely rustic; its grammar is basic. Greek, on the other hand, conceives language as a work of art: that is why he is particularly careful concerning grammar and rhetoric (arts which are studied).

Due to his idiosyncrasy, the Hebrew uses many images, metaphors, accounts, i.e. he has a pictorial style in his speech. Good examples of this are Prophets and the Revelations. The Greek, on the other hand, shows off his commandment of the language, the care with terms, the richness of words and nuances to refer to general aspects and abstractions. From the Greco-Roman world emerged the great poets, writers and orators whose works we consider «classics». The Hebrew writings did not present reflections of a philosophical nature until they came into contact with the Greek world.

### 3. Anthropology

According to the Semitic mindset, the human being was perceived as a whole, as an «I», manifesting in different ways. Terms like body, blood, spirit or flesh, besides referring to the real meanings, were often used in a metaphorical sense to refer to the different forms in which the human being manifests its existence. Hence, body describes the person «I» as seen from the perspective of its communicability. Blood and spirit (or breath) convey life, since this is what differentiates the dead from the living (does not breathe, blood does not flow, is no longer warm). Flesh is matter as such, the one which suffers and disintegrates after death (unlike the body!).

The viscera is the seat of feelings and emotions. Abel's blood cries to heaven for justice (Gn 4,10) and the blood that Jesus will pour out for many (Ma 14,24) is not other than his life, his «I» in every living person in this world. The human being is a body; it does not «have» a body. That is why Jesus said «take and eat my body»: enter into communion with me. Paul warned the Corinthians that «flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God» (1Cor. 15,50). The expression «the Lord be with your spirit» means «the Lord be with you». Spirit is «I», expressed in the vital activities, given by God and belongs to Him (let us remember the Creation: God breathed his breath of life).

When Saint Paul referred to persons in their relational realities, he used to do it from the *Semitic* anthropology. In that way, flesh is guilty of sin and opposes spirit. Therefore, resurrection would happen to the body, and not the flesh (1Cor 15,35ss). To Paul, as to every Semite, the *soul* is the seat of the functions of consciousness and ceases to exist after death; it is not the soul, but *spirit* the one which survives. The soul, like the flesh, pertains to this transitory world and ceases to exist after death. All this might seem strange to us, since we think like the Greek, not like the Semites.

In the Greek world, on the other hand, particularly due to the influence of the Aristotelian and Platonic philosophies, the human being was considered a composite of

body and soul, as a simple whole. Hellenism overvalued the soul and often despised the body; the practice of virtue was considered the greatest treasure. The «spiritual», the essence, was fundamental to the Greek. They understood death as a separation between body and soul –not as a change in the form of existence, still with the possession of the «I», as the Semite conceives it- and salvation pertains only to the soul. This is the way of understanding the human being which we have inherited and which differs from the way of thinking in most texts of the Bible. In other words, the Semite has a *unified* vision of the human being (it is a whole, an «I» in various manifestations); the Greek has a *dualistic* vision where «body and soul» are opposed to each other.

Besides this, we must emphasise that in the Semitic world the person was regarded especially as a *relational* being; a person's life was defined by the relationships with the neighbour and God and not by what separated them from the others. The «Ten Commandments» clearly express this and it becomes evident in Jesus of Nazareth's preaching. The focus was on community life, which was decisive, rather than on individual or «inner» private life. They wondered about the acts of the person (their relationship with the world) and not their essence (apart from the world). The Hebrew asks *who* is the person; the Greek asks *what it is*. As we see, this has serious ethical implications.

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## G. "SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION: PROGRESS AND SETBACKS OF THE HISTORICAL PROTESTANT CHURCHES"

*Rev. Araceli Ezzatti*

National Consultation Uruguay 1 September 2012

### **Introduction**

The way of thinking and the attitudes of Protestant churches towards human sexuality are so influenced by social, economic and political factors that they get constantly and ambivalently carried back and forth from open-mindedness to repression, unfortunately reaching the point of distorting, being unfaithful to, or sometimes even betraying the very principles which gave rise to it - or betraying the biblical message, which is even more serious.

The churches which emerge, or rather, which subscribe to the principles of the Reformation as their doctrinal basis, are largely free to read reality from the perspective of their freedom of spirit, their faithfulness to the Word and inclusion in all its dimensions.

I will briefly go through these principles as a framework:

- The doctrine of justification by faith. The relationship of human beings with God within the context of Grace, which reconciles and restores, instead of discrimination for the merits and the works, which are an expression of human impermanence.
- The free interpretation of the word of God. The people, protagonist reader, is the interpreter of the Revelation in its written form or in its historical daily form, without the mediation of the various interests of scholars and experts who wear blinkers and stand against those culturally different: the ignorant, uncultured or primitive, as they are often called.
- The doctrine of free will. There is not an inexorable predestined fate for people,

but every human being has the freedom to walk their own way, not determined by the human boundaries of economy, geography, ideas, races or the programming of social structures.

- Universal priesthood of all believers. We are all apt, albeit responsible as well, to minister the faith, avoiding the exclusive categories of class, gender, sex, race, hierarchy.

These principles lean towards the acknowledgement of the fundamental rights of the human being, who is: diverse, free, with potentialities to develop, in an inclusive society which seeks justice.

If we fulfilled these precepts, Protestant churches should not have any issues of discrimination or exclusion. However, we are far from this Utopia and there are historical, doctrinal, social and economic reasons which interfere with the liberty and fraternity that the Gospels radiate.

Michael Foucault tells us that “By placing the advent of the age of repression in the seventeenth century, after hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression, one adjusts it to coincide with the development of capitalism: it becomes an integral part of the bourgeois order...if sex is so rigorously repressed, this is because it is incompatible with a general and intensive work imperative”<sup>1</sup> Why remember this quotation by Foucault here? Because although we blame the Victorian times severely for their “carefully confined sex”, we cannot belittle the discourse of “modern Puritanism” (very Protestant), which imposed its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence”<sup>2</sup> concerning sex. This way of thinking has had a major influence to this day in non-historical Protestant and Evangelical churches, expressed in their concept of sin:

The lust of non-procreative sex; the condemnation of pleasure as a waste of the time and strength that should be devoted to work; the offence to God at every relationship which deviates from the heteronormativity, as corruption of the body and human relationships. There has been a denial of the body as a theological issue and a denial of pleasure as a right of all human beings.

These discourses and their practices have been around for almost three centuries, combating the non-conformist voices which have risen against sexual repression by means of speech, fight or even the cruellest repression and death. “Repression has been the fundamental link between power, knowledge and sexuality ...we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power”<sup>3</sup>, says Foucault.

This statement has been confirmed, once and again, by the LGTB community, a target of the repression and discrimination without concessions by the churches. The story goes back and forth, since homosexuality has been and is an issue where the churches have a wide range of opinions, doctrines and ethical positions. These range from the most strict evangelical fundamentalism –or that of orthodox Catholics, Mormons or Orthodox Christians, among others- to the of tolerant, open-minded churches which allow an internal debate –such as Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Waldensi-

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, Michel “History of sexuality” Volume I -25 edition Ed.Siglo XXI p.14

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit. p.15

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit. p.25

ans- among these we can find from the most radical censorship to the most hopeful inclusion, which always results in community and theological growth in the denomination. However, the road is not always smooth, there are ups and downs. It depends from which perspective we look at each other, what interests we defend, what spaces we want to protect, what image we want to cultivate. We will briefly analyse some of the paths we follow as churches, which are not always faithful to the Gospel.

#### 1. THE PROBLEM OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION, FUNDAMENTAL IN PROTESTANTISM

Due to the programmatic content of this seminar, we will not go through the hermeneutics of the texts used as a cudgel for the deepest censorship and to back up the guilt. But we must say that the Protestant freedom to interpret the Bible often falls into the sin of distortion and abuse of the text so as to reinforce discriminations which are the product of human selfishness and injustice. The true sin is the manipulation of the Word, especially the interpretation of those harsh passages of Jesus which point directly to the command of divine justice through our acts: such as Jesus' proclamation in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry, Lk 4:18-19.

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free”<sup>4</sup> Are we so narrow-minded that we choose those we place in these categories and leave others out? Isn't this proclamation of Jesus in the Synagogue, amidst an extremely discriminative society a radical declaration, an unconditional call to inclusion? Or the Great Commission: Mk 16:15, when Jesus says to his disciples: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation”.<sup>5</sup> No room for doubt. Or the woman caught in the act of adultery, Jn 8:1-11 “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her”.<sup>6</sup>

Very often, these passages are cut so as to make them less radical; in this way we reduce the ministry of Jesus to the poor or to the Great Commission, which we find more accessible, or we identify the adulterous woman with the groups of people that stand outside our restricted ethics. The interpretation of the Word has developed thanks to the work of pastors, biblicists, theologians from Asia, Africa, Latin America, who have heard the living readings of the people and of those groups so-called “minorities” due to race, sex, social situation. But there are constant assaults by the churches in those very continents in order to get back to the safety of the traditional European theologies. Or worse, to promote a literal reading, without any commitment with reality or the with the people, taken out of context and exclusive. Groups like “Human life International” or “Enfoque en la Familia” (Focus on the Family).

#### 2. THE PROBLEM OF BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES IN SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS WHICH ARE EXCLUSIVE.

The historical Evangelical Churches have been traditionally linked to the middle classes, if not the rich, with a growing opening trend towards the poor, especially driven by the rising theologies committed to the processes of social and economic liberation. This movement is, incidentally, not accepted, in general. There are, and have always been, evangelical sectors which have resisted it and have gained strength by rejecting the new visions of the mission of the church and, in many cases, have provoked irreversible ruptures within the same denomination. This becomes especially clear around issues such as: homosexuality, abortion, divorce, assisted fertility,

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<sup>4</sup> Bible. New Revised Standard Version. New Testament

<sup>5</sup> Bible. New Revised Standard Version. New Testament.

<sup>6</sup> Bible. New Revised Standard Version. New Testament.

transsexual operations, ordained women's ministry, among others. A clear example of this was the major conflict created within the World Anglican Church –which is not Protestant but recognises the Bible as maximum authority. The ordination of Bishop Robinson in the USA in 2005 is an example: millions of believers threatened to move away in all five continents due to the ordination of a homosexual minister in that hierarchy.

In this way, churches go back and forth in their positions, willing to be defenders of Human Rights and committed to those who are marginalised—a fact which is also encouraged for field projects by donor agencies but, on the other hand, trying to meet the demands of an agreed membership which sets clear limits between “the groups” which are helped and their own space of social, Christian worship and sense of belonging. Two people left one of our Methodist Churches, accusing the pastor of offering the Holy Communion to sinners (gays who regularly attend the service).

The Methodist Church in Uruguay held a meeting of pastors a few years ago to discuss the issue of homosexuality. After a whole day filled with the most diverse opinions from pastors, ranging from plain rejection, up to attitudes of deep love and commitment, through condescendence, indifference, it was decided that those pastors willing to offer the service to homosexuals, were free to do so.

### 3. THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE CHURCHES WITH THE GOVERNMENTS AND THE LGTB COMMUNITY

The issue of civil rights among the members of the LGTB community has made significant progress in Latin America, especially with the recognition of same-sex partnership and property administration laws, although not so much in the field of child adoption.

The 38<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of OAS (Organisation of American States) points out an important milestone: the topic “Human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity”<sup>7</sup> will be included in the agenda of the coming period. This is, undoubtedly, a wide frame of reference for decisions being taken in many countries. For example, Uruguay passed the law of same-sex partnership and is the first Latin American country to do so, “couples of any sex may register, with similar rights to those deriving from heterosexual marriage”.<sup>8</sup>

These resolutions have encountered great resistance from both the Catholic and the conservative Evangelical churches, with harsh accusations towards the socialist government, of destroying the family as the building block of society and fostering perverse practices which violate human nature.

Many times, secular governments go through more inclusive and just paths than Christian churches, which often claim to represent the “healthiest and most fair” ethics in society.

### 4. ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Throughout the many years of participation in the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC, it has been difficult to introduce the issue of sexuality in theological discussions. What made the commission create a group to reflect upon Theology

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<sup>7</sup> Document from the 38 Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly.

<sup>8</sup> Law of Civil Unions, passed by the Uruguayan Parliament, Feb. 2008

and Anthropology was the influence of feminist theologians of the so-called “Third World”. We began to discuss –timidly- issues such as the body, ethnic groups, people with different abilities, immigrants, but the LGTB did not come up as a topic, only as brief comments in answer to the growing visibility of priests, pastors and bishops. There was strong resistance from the Catholic and Orthodox groups, as well as some Protestant denominations, especially from Africa, but also from Latin America and Asia. What is more, this Commission still has not officially pronounced on women’s ordination and even less, on gay and lesbian ordination. A WCC commission about sexuality has been formed, but we hear little about their work. The interesting point about this silence is the basic argument, the WCC must safeguard the Unity of the Church. Controversial topics for some of its denominations, such as: the Last Supper, women’s ministry, homosexuality, etc., do not lead to that unity.

### **Some ways out**

#### **1. AN OPENING IN SPACES OF EXCLUSION**

Christian communities have doctrinal tools and spaces of mission to open ways out of discrimination. The work of many of the groups represented here is a testimony. It is difficult and it has a high cost in terms of human lives and suffering, as it is happening right now in Jamaica, where cults are celebrated clandestinely. Leaders need bodyguards and even so, they have not been able to prevent the deaths of some brothers and sisters. But if we quit trying, even though we do not perceive great results, we will never see the new time of human dignity restored for all. We must save the spaces for inclusive meetings.

#### **2. THE DISCOURSE ON HOMOSEXUALITY WHEN MEETING THE OTHER PERSON**

One of the forms to avoid the commitment with the LGTB community is to theorise about it and regard it as a conflictive subject. “The problem of homosexuality”, and from that starting point, one can give any opinion, censor, separate, insult, but one must not see them, touch them, look into their eyes. The secret to fight my discriminatory instinct is to meet the person: when we are able to look at each other, to hug each other, something happens. While visiting a Rwanda genocide memorial centre, a phrase left its mark on me, like a milestone: “if you had looked me in the eyes, you would not have killed me”. We must learn to run the risk of seeing the other as a challenge of new life, not as a threat of death.

#### **3. REREADING OF THE WORD FROM THE BODY, SEXUALITY AND PLEASURE**

The protestant churches have historically struggled with denial of the body and limitation of the feelings by representing faith with the symbols of rationalism. The scarcity of forms of expression regarding feelings and the body clearly show in the bare temples and austere celebrations, where music and other forms of art gradually began to gain spaces.

Denial of the body has been silent in the issues of life itself: sexuality, diseases, stages of life, economic activity, politics, etc., everything that lives, changes, alters and brings conflict to the person and the group.

Perverse sinful equations illustrate the use of adjectives describing flesh against spirit, e.g. impure-pre-marital sex; perverse-anti-natural-gay-lesbian; dangerous-subversive-leftist-activists; etc. But it is a definite denial of the carnality of the human being, what is denied is comparable to denying the incarnation of Christ. The spirit is placed in an indefinite place, far away from temptations. Spirituality is measured by the cultural practices, omitting the fact that we live in a body. The Brazilian

theologians, the gender-based contributions and the Queer theology have made great progress in the expression of the body as a theological space, but this still encounters resistance from traditional Theology. It depends on us to work and contribute towards an inclusive social experience, enriched by diversity, guided by justice. But, above all, it is important to understand that dignity and the enjoyment of life are rights which society cannot deprive us from, no matter how hard it tries; we have the power of the word, the power to speak. I close with the words of a famous psychoanalyst, Nestor Braunstein, who brilliantly relates the sexual determiners to the word: “neither women, nor men are born as such, but they become such from the initial event of sex-attribution: girl, boy ... which sometimes becomes a destiny, regardless of the anatomy... sexuality is defined by a discourse and anatomy eventually conforms to it, or not.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps this is the time to raise our voices for the other discourse, the one voicing the reality of life.

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<sup>9</sup> Braunstein, Nestor, “Goce” 3rd edition 1998. Ed. Siglo XXI. P. 107

# H. Against all discrimination, we embrace our brothers and sisters

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## **Introduction**

I think that Judeo-Christianity has made an important theological contribution to the understanding of humankind in terms of equality. The Declaration of Human Rights can be thought of as an achievement of humankind, of which the Judeo-Christian tradition is a part. Biblical texts such as Gn. 1:26-27, which state that every human being is created in the image and according to the likeness of God becomes a fundamental text if we bear in mind that in the ancient Middle East only kings were regarded as similar to the Gods.

Likewise, Christianity programmatically manifested in Gal.3:28, reinforces its search to form a society of equals, an inclusive society. This seems in frank opposition to a compartmented society, with the status of free persons and slaves; men and women; Greek and Jewish, etc.

However, when we are invited to think in terms of sexual rights, we must recognise that our tradition has not been equally positive. Rather, it has favoured a censoring view of human sexuality, permitting it only in the context of matrimony and supported only as a means of procreation. Biblical interpretation has been and is used, on many occasions, to justify that oppression and discrimination.

## **Some texts to make us ponder on inclusion**

It is worth dwelling upon texts such as Luke 10:25-37, where the question “Who is my neighbour?” is posed. This question does not come out of nowhere, but it is a search to define love to the neighbour. The parable that Jesus tells is an invitation to include a foreigner, a despised Samaritan, in the recognition of “neighbour”. Moreover, Jesus places the Lawyer’s compatriot as the one in need and the Samaritan as the one providing it, so as to show the role of a neighbour. The category of “Samaritan” does not awaken in us the same feelings of rejection as it awakened in the character who approaches Jesus with the question. Rubem Alves tries to recreate, and he suc-

ceeds brilliantly, this parable by telling the story of an encounter between an beaten and robbed young man and a transvestite who takes care of him.

The encounter between Jesus and a Canaanite woman, according to the account of Matthew 15:21-28 is a beautiful process of transformation of Jesus as well, where he adds this woman and her daughter as part of the project of salvation of God. The transformation Jesus experiences is surely an invitation to Matthew's listeners, mostly Judeo-Christian, to undergo the same experience and, in that way, go and make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19).

Finally, Acts 8:26-39 tells us how Philip, as he was escaping from Jerusalem, he meets an Ethiopian eunuch, who rejoices at the good news and is baptised. We should note that the text mentions this person five times as a eunuch. In ancient times, the term eunuch did not only include castrated persons, but also those who were not attracted to women. The titles given to the story make this condition "invisible", as they prefer to call it "Philip and the Ethiopian" or "Philip and the Ethiopian official"

### **Genesis 2-3**

Among the biblical texts, one of the most influential ones in our culture has been the text about creation in Genesis 2-3. The chosen interpretation, by Saint Augustine, which links sexuality to sin, has had a major influence in our culture. In that sense, the first activity I suggest is that we work on that text, not by reading it, but by trying to remember it in the way we were taught it, by giving it a title, etc.

In the second part, our task will be to read the text together with some guiding questions.

#### **2:4-17**

How was the first human being formed? (v.7) and what for (v.5)?  
What relation do you find between this and v. 2:15?

#### **2:18-25**

What is God looking for by creating other beings? (v.18)? What does humankind do in the presence of them? What part of the human body does God take as a basis for his last creation? Why this particular part?  
What does God do with his new creation and what does man do? (Compare 2:20)?  
Is there any reference to sexuality?

#### **3:1-7**

What adjective/s is/are used to describe the snake in the text? What does the snake promise to the woman? How does this relate to 2:16-17 and who was forbidden to eat from that tree? What happens after eating the fruit?

#### **3:8-19**

What is the consequence for the snake, for the woman and for the man?

#### **3:20-24**

What have human beings gained from eating the fruit?  
Where is the human being sent forth from?, where to? And, what for?  
What relation does this have with 2:5? What makes it possible for the human being to fulfill their destiny?

## Contributions regarding interpretation, translation and the text itself

When we compare the way this text has been received in western culture with the text itself, we find a significant gap. We need to read it in a different light, to deconstruct an imposed view which links sexuality to sin and the woman to sin, as well as woman's subordination to man. This interpretation has its roots in our reading of the Bible at three levels; we need to work in the deconstruction of all three. Firstly, its interpretation. The tireless work done by feminist interpreters has shown us the ways in which the texts have been read from such an androcentric perspective, that they have imposed a specific meaning to the text and hidden other meanings. This has not only happened when interpreting the text, but also during its very **translation**. When it is translated from the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek) into Spanish, there are translating choices which reflect the translator's opinion more than the biblical text itself. But we must recognise that there are **texts** which contain such a patriarchal perspective that they cannot "be saved".

### 1. At an interpretative level

Phyllis Trible points out a few aspects that we usually take for granted when reading these texts:

- A male God created a man firstly, which makes him superior. Secondly, he created woman, which makes her inferior.
- Woman is created as a helper, a lesser companion to relieve man in his solitude.
- Woman tempted man; therefore she is responsible for all human sin.
- Woman is cursed with labour pains.

The idea of sin or the fall, as well as the inferiority of Eve appears in the 2nd century B.C. in Ecclesiasticus (Deuterocanon) 25:24

*"Sin began with a woman,  
and because of her all of us die"*

In the **Book of Adam and Eve** (apocrypha) 5:4-5

"Oh god, forgive me my sin, the sin I which I committed and do not remember it against me. For I alone caused your servant to fall from the garden into this condemned land; from light into this darkness; and from the house of joy into this prison."

Taken up again, clearly, in **1 Timoteo** 2:13-14

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yest, she will be saved thorough childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."

However, Romans 5:12 says:

*"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man (avnqrw,poj), and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because we all have sinned."*

And there is not one single case in the Hebrew Bible where Genesis 2-3 is used to talk about sin.

A different, more attentive reading of the text finds that Gn 2-3 combines several genres. Carol Meyers mentions: myth, etiology and wisdom parable. It refers to archetypes, rather than prototypes “the characters in the creation story present the *essential* (archetypal) features of human life, not the *first* (prototypical) humans in a historical sense.” (p. 80-81)

En tal sentido “The narrative provides an etiological response to the precariousness of Israelite life, and Yahweh’s speeches in Genesis 3 to the female and male give sanction to the apparently inevitable life-style of the Israelite highlanders.” (84) Therefore, the text does not justify a specific situation, but it describes it and fundamentals it -Gn. 1 and 2- as a “divine plan” and Gn 3, as a consequence of human disobedience.

## 2. At a level of translation

Elements to bear in mind:

’adam, ’adamah, ’ish, ’ishshah

- The Hebrew term ’adam means human, man and Adam (forename). The translation of the Bible has chosen to translate in Gen 2-3, in the entire chapter. 2, ’adam as “man”. This option in the translation leaves out any possibility to interpret the creation of an androgynous being who later on, with the creation of woman, will be perceived as man and woman. That is, the creation of woman introduces the difference in gender (cf. 2:25).
- The wordplay ’adam (human) ’adamah (ground or earth) might be better reflected if we translate human (’adam)/ humus (’adamah). “The term ’adam tells us that the essence of human life is not its eventual classification into gendered categories but rather its organic connection to the earth.” To that which is capable of supporting life. Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 82,
- Man and woman (v.23): same wordplay: ’ishshah for out of ’ish this one was taken. This wordplay reflects precisely the identity and correspondence between man and woman.

### HUMAN BEING AND WORK

The need of humans to work the land is stated in Gn 2:, and this is poetically and linguistically reflected in the wordplay shown above. And it is finally fulfilled in Gn. 3:23 when the human being is sent forth from the Garden of Eden, to the ground:

Gn 2:5:

*No plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground.*

Gn 3:23

*The Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.*

*This is important, since it states that the incident of human disobedience does not only have dramatic consequences for humankind, but it was also a necessary event so that human beings finally reach the place where they were taken and where they finally return.*

#### “APPROPRIATE HELP”

*The goal of creating other beings arises as a need to find a counterpart of the human being. The Hebrew expression used there is ‘ezer kenegdo. But we cannot assume that help implies inferiority. In fact, the term ‘ezer is used as a reference to God, who also appears as help for the human being: Sal 121:2; 124:8; 146:5; 33:20; 115:9-11; Ex. 18:4; Dt. 33:7, 26, 29. Besides, neged literally means “opposite, in front of, opposed to, etc.”*

*Thus, the expression ‘ezer kenegdo might be better translated and interpreted as “counterpart”, “partner” o “companion”.*

#### SUFFERING

The words uttered by God to the serpent, the woman and the man must not be interpreted as as a prescription or a mandate, but as a myth, it reflects the reality of the moment in the Israeli peasant life, as well as a specific understanding of human relationships and relationship with nature.

Having said this, we need to point out, at a level of translation, that God says to the woman:

*‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children,  
yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you.’*

It is clear, therefore, that suffering is not only restricted to pregnancy, but it extends into other areas, as expressed in the first line. That way, woman’s life is not reduced to the activity of procreation.

### **3. At an interpretative level**

#### SIN AND SEXUALITY

At the beginning we pointed out Saint Augustine’s influence and the correlation between disobedience and sexuality. A link is hence made between sexuality and sin. However, the elements presented so far show us that sexuality is already present in the very creation of human beings of both sexes: “Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” (Gn. 2.24-25). Sexuality is present before the serpent’s deceit and it is good, it is the will of God.

#### HETEROSEXUALITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

This text is strongly marked by procreation. Obviously, this is not the only meaning of sexuality. The Book of Song of Solomon greatly captures the abundance, pleasure and enjoyment of sexuality

I find it difficult to find a biblical text which talks in an explicit and positive way about homosexuality. Firstly, because homosexuality as we know it does not appear in the biblical horizons. There are, indeed, references to same-sex relationships (this is not necessarily a reference to homosexuality as we understand it now).

The discussion, therefore, moves on to determining whether biblical references, such as Lv 18:22; 20:13; 1Cor 6:9; etc. work as guiding criteria or whether the new

information provided to us by human knowledge concerning sexual identity, sexual orientation and practices lead us to the necessity to discover new categorisations.

This would not be new, since Biblical wisdom literature is characterised by adding human thought and wisdom in its theology.

### **To continue**

Lastly, a look which recognises the dignity of all persons as sons and daughters of God and is against every form of discrimination needs to undergo a process of rereading of the biblical texts and the different traditions. It is necessary to acknowledge the impact they have in people's lives and how they are used to justify situations of oppression and death, or if, on the other hand, they are the good news for people, providing us with liberation and hope. What we must decide, in community, seeking inspiration from the Holy Spirit (as done by the Christian community when the Gentiles were included –Acts 15), is how to be an inclusive community and what texts will be an authority to us and which will remain as memory.

# I. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION CLAI- UNFPA BOLIVIA

## **Biblical-theological perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Rights**

The Holy Scriptures teach us to reflect, understand and value the human person as the image of God; their sexuality, especially, should be seen as a gift of God which includes our whole being in an integral way.

Whenever we approach these issues from our perspective, we find that sexuality is, without a doubt, a very sensitive topic and, at the same time, of great complexity, not only because it deals with human nature, but also because the existing views on this matter influence the culture supporting them. Besides, it has been considered “taboo” throughout history. The Christian church has not been able to stay on the edge concerning such a contingent issue. Unfortunately, it has not always been a contribution towards development, many times it has been secularised and reduced to mere concepts of sin, human reproduction or discussions on abstinence and celibacy. In this process, we acknowledge that as theological pastors, we have been unable to deal with some specific topic, leaving it aside in our theological agenda.<sup>1</sup>

From the ecclesiastic and pastoral perspective, there is a growing concern about Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Bolivian society. We notice this, for instance, in advertising, the media, the new laws, activist movements. All the events in Bolivia are an invitation for us to reflect upon and become involved in our faith communities with this human dimension, since the material and commercial vision dehumanises and objectifies the creation of God.

As Christians, it is important to value ourselves, to have a healthy self-esteem because we are creatures of God and also, to challenge ourselves to rethink concepts again, to deconstruct the old practices/dogmas/cultures/systems/structures in order to transform them into messengers of new life.

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<sup>1</sup>

Currently, several organisations and institutions are making efforts to face these issues. Due to the overwhelming reality, Christian believers in the God of Life cannot ignore them or stay on the sidelines; we must read what God tells us about it, enlighten our way with the Holy Bible.

Our socio-cultural context from the perspective of SRR, is conditioned by the relations and identities of our masculinities and femininities. These, in turn, relate to worldviews and values. All this is variable, depending on the area we refer to: urban or rural, Andean areas or the lowlands.<sup>2</sup>

The roots which condition our practices in the patriarchal context are linked to the construction of our masculinities and femininities. Male identity is oriented to domination: man is the one who conquers, the provider; he develops mostly in the public arena. On the other hand, female identity relates to sensitivity and care for the family, the private world.

Patriarchal gender-based relationships are built on the basis of control of women's bodies and sexuality. They are hierarchical, male-centred, adult-centred relationships. And the practices which violate Sexual and Reproductive Rights are made effective by that type of relationships.

### **Biblical-theological Basis in relation to Sexual and Reproductive Rights?<sup>3</sup>**

**Biblical principles:** Let us begin by remembering that, as Christians, we start from non-negotiable principles,

- Every human being is image of God and in his likeness Gen 1.26
- The human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit 1Cor 6.19
- The body is of God 1 Cor. 12, Psalm 139.14
- The body was sanctified through the offering of Christ. Hebrews 10.10

In the Bible we read that God is the Creator of the human body and the statement is good. The body belongs to God and is his dwelling. God gave us the clearest message, the importance of the human body, by presenting himself as a human being in front of us, by incarnating in Jesus. The body is so sacred that God gave it the ability to enjoy, to have pleasure (Gn. 18.2, Prov. 5.15-19, 1 Cor. 7.3-5), the ability of sensuality (Songs), the ability to unite sexually, emotionally and spiritually as partners (Gen 2.24, Ef 5.31), and be blessed by God.

God created man and woman to communicate and converse, with respect and obedience from both sides and therefore, live in harmony.

However, human beings did not understand this blessing and distorted the grace granted to them, resulting in aggression to the body, the violation of this temple by means of physical, sexual, verbal, psychological violence, because of bodily instinct, or political, economic, social, religious reasons by a patriarchal, ethnocentric, materialistic system.

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<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup>

Society and even our churches are the bearers and legitimisers of discrimination, abuse of power, domestic violence, sexual violence, physical and psychological violence, firstly, for being part of the patriarchal and consumeristic society, but also for its decontextualised biblical interpretations. In diverse circles we hear: “It is women who lead to sexual sin”, “man is the head of the household”, hence “woman should do as man says”, “woman depends on man because she was made out of man’s rib”, “woman has no right to control her body”, “women are fragile”, “Jesus chose male apostles, not women”, “God incarnated as a man, not a woman”.

The Bible contains these different voices, among others, the voices of the women who suffered rape and they became silenced victims; let us go through some passages, in the hope that these acts never occur again:

### **Biblical texts portraying the horror of sexual violence against adolescent and adult women and girls**

BIBLICAL TEXT	WOMEN WHO SUFFERED SEXUAL VIOLENCE
Genesis 34.1-31	Dina’s dishonour: raped by Shechem.
Judges 11.29-40	Jephthah’s daughter: he made a vow for holocaust, he would offer up one person if he won the battle. When he came to his home, his virgin, adolescent daughter came out to meet him, and she was sacrificed to God.
Judges 19	The Levite’s concubine: who was raped by several men all through the night and nobody helped her; as if it were not enough, his concubine grasped her and cut her into pieces.
Judges 21.19-22	The sons of Israel, around the altar, decide to attack the city and kidnap all the young virgins.
2 Samuel 13.1-39	Tamar and Amnon: The sexual violence that Tamar suffers happens in her own home, an environment full of conflicts and struggle for power. The executor of violence is a relative, or a brother, and other men in the family are accomplices and remain quiet. But the victim does not remain passive in front of the violence; on the contrary, she protests and raises her voice to make the rape public. However, her voice is crushed and silenced.
2 Samuel 16.21-23	Absalom rapes all of David’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.
Numbers 25.1-18	The massacre of Cozbi, the Midianite, who is pierced with a spear through the belly in the sight of the whole village.

Below we will mention some texts which reveal the legitimacy of laws to violate women’s bodies; women had no possibility of defence or appeal, no chance to let anyone know their accounts and their views.

TEXTO BIBLICO AT	LAWS WHICH LEGITIMISE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN'S BODIES
Numbers 5.11-31	Water of bitterness. Just due to jealousy and suspicion, a woman must drink the water of bitterness. If she has been unfaithful, she will abort in front of the priest.
Exodus 21.21	Lex Talionis. When a man pushes another man's wife and makes her fall, he must pay a fine only if there is a miscarriage. If there is further harm, then they shall pay an eye for an eye.
Leviticus 21.7	A raped woman cannot have a husband.
Deuteronomy 22.22-24	The woman charged with adultery, and the virgin who has been raped will be stoned.
Isaiah 13.15-16	Prophecy about Babylon. Raped women, infants dashed to pieces.
Leviticus 12	Purification of the woman after labour.
Leviticus 15.19	A woman is separated from the community if she has a discharge of blood.

To these testimonies, we add the research of female Biblicists and exegetes, who unveil male-centred translations which hide the hierarchical positions, the authority to name women, to name their children; the gift of bringing forth new life is hidden and the body of the woman is objectified.

BIBLICAL TEXT	MALE-CENTRED TRANSLATIONS
1 Kings 1.1-4	Translates the Shunammite as a "water bag" for old King David, but the same term is translated as "administrator" in Isaiah 22.15.
Genesis 49.3	The name given by Rachel to her son is translated as "son of pain, sadness", but the same term-name, given by Jacob is translated as "one of my vigour, of my might".
Genesis	When Eve gave birth to Cain, she said: I have brought forth a man like Yahve. It is translated as "I have gotten a man with the help of Yahve".

In this review we also find brave women, who -despite having a whole patriarchal system against them- fight and claim for their right of life in all areas: civil and religious; they question the authority and justice that act against their bodies and integral life.

BIBLICAL TEXT	WOMEN DEMANDING RIGHTS OF LIFE, CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS RIGHTS
Exodus 1.1-22	The midwives who were instructed to kill all the boys disobeyed and let them live, together with other women they saved the lives of many children, among them Moses.
Genesis 38.1-30	Tamar stands for her right to have children, she disguises and fulfills that right with her father-in-law.
Numbers 27.1-11	The daughters of Zelophehad fight for their inheritance to the land although it was not allowed for women to own land.
Ruth	Ruth and Naomi, the widows, return to their homeland and with their work and effort make the law of Levirate be fulfilled to obtain bread and home.
Nehemiah 5.1-5	Women demand a social reform from Nehemiah, so as to distribute the land equitably when those in exile returned from Babylon. As a result, and exceptionally, a Jubilee is proclaimed (land reform and debt relief).
Numbers 12	Miriam asks: Why can God only communicate with men? For that, she is punished with leprosy all over her body.
Luke 18.	The perseverant widow makes an unfair judge grant her justice.
Matthew 9.20-22	A woman suffering from haemorrhages tries to be healed by touching Jesus' cloak, even when she knew it was forbidden to touch a man while "impure".

In the texts above we can see God's view, supporting women; in others we see the solidarity, acknowledgement and appreciation of women by the people.

Images of God. If a woman's body were something bad, sinful, unworthy, God would not take on female characteristics, but we find these images:

BIBLICAL TEXT	IMAGES OF GOD –with a FEMALE body
Isaiah 46.3	God is pregnant
Isaiah 42.14	God cries out like a woman in labour
Hosea 11.1-4	God takes care, teaches to walk.
Job 38.8	God wraps with diapers

As closure to our biblical review, we acknowledge that the patriarchal system imposed and legitimised actions against women's bodies, but we find clear signs that the true, divine message is that the woman is the image of God and in his likeness and this is sacred; we must value her body, her mind and spirit as Jesus, God incarnate, the One who came so that we would have life in abundance, (Jn. 10.10), showed us, i.e. a life where the body, sexuality and reproduction are not oppressed.

Moreover, the Holy Scriptures reveal that all persons can experience body integrity, personal autonomy and gender equality in a culturally diverse society and above all, we must respect all persons as subjects and creatures of God, not just as mere political or commercial objects.

Other texts that refer to this are: Galatians 3.28, Corinthians 7.5-9, Hebrews 13.4.

### **Some proposals from women theologians concerning SRR<sup>4</sup>**

Violence against women is an ethical and democratic scandal. Violence against women is the result of gender relationships characterised by power inequality, which in turn affects all the structures and the collective imaginary in a society. It is a multi-sectorial, integral issue regarding human rights, public safety and public health. But, above all, or because of it all, it is an issue to democratic agendas and horizons in societies, since its solution requires innumerable democratic changes. The responsibility of the States in these is fundamental, as the responsibility of civil societies and its democratic men's and women's movements. (Virginia Vargas)

- The experiences on the basis of men's and women's bodies in the Bible, nudity, the beauty of the body, physical appearance and chastity must be dealt with very carefully, which entails that other issues might emerge, widening the approach of sexuality and related topics in the Bible, such as, e.g. infertility, menstruation, labour, maternity, contraception and prevention.

In this sense, we are challenged to discuss controversial topics, such as the ones experienced in the borderlines: homosexuality, adultery, prostitution; as well as the issue of violent practices around the sexuality in the Bible. (Elaine Neuenfeldt)

- For a long time, the scientific language has been confirmed as the coherent speech about the world and relationships, since it is possible to verify and prove, discerning the false from the true.

The scientific language about the body is reduced to biology, medicine and a certain reductionist psychology.

The religious language about the body works on generalities, concerned about regulating and conforming. The body is always present in cyclical rituals –baptism, matrimony, and funeral. It is present in the Eucharist, the body of Christ is mystified, disembodied, and it only takes over its functionality: sacrifice, solidarity, atonement, etc. (Nancy Cardozo)

- Woman must be valued and appreciated because she gives life. Woman is a creature created by God in order to be a guide, a helper, an advisor to a person. The love of a woman towards another person is endless.

Sexuality must be fully enjoyed so as to have positive results to build up a new life.

The couple is created by God to live abundantly, to enjoy together what they have and this must be in respect and obedience to each other, holding on to each other so as to have equity. (Maritza Castañeta)

### **Challenges to spirituality**

The main challenge to faith-based communities is to promote a new spirituality which is, at the same time, a foundation for developing new sexual identities. When we talk about spirituality, we talk about practical changes in both, personal and collective identities, so as to lead new lives, transformed by new equitable, fraternal

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and and relationships. Changes fueled by the Spirit of God. Only by changes at this level can we manage to alter the persisting patriarchal structures and paradigms in our society. And only by transforming these patriarchal structures can we guarantee the full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights.

It is important to take some elements, such as historical memory, personal identity and sexuality in order to enjoy a healthy and fraternal spirituality in our human coexistence. And to try, in this way, to maintain harmony in our relationship with the God of life. From this perspective, we must also bear in mind our relationships with the other, with ourselves, with the environment. All these relationships affect our spirituality. Besides, spirituality is related to our historical memory: it is important to know where we come from and where we are going to (schatological perspective). We can only formulate social, cultural and political utopical projects based on a new historical memory and new schatological significance which guarantee equitable gender relationships and the full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights.

Another challenge is to live well, to live in harmony inside and outside the family, so that we can be a testimony for the people around us.

Those who know the word of God must be hearers and doers and contribute to society so that the changes can happen.

A change in our spirituality entails the following transformation in our relationships:

- To go from a relationship with an only God, male and self-sufficient, to a relationship with the Trinitarian community (Triune God in community).
- To go from a relationship with the other as an individual to a relationship in the community. A community of gifts and care (as the Trinitarian community), rather than conquest and exploitation.
- To go from the instrumental use of the environment (associated with the exploitation of natural resources) to a relationship of communion with and care of mother Earth.
- To go from distorted relationships with ourselves (colonised identities), to new integral identities which include a sexuality that is open to communion, gift and enjoyment.

It is about changing from an individualistic and self-sufficient (colonial) spirituality, to a spirituality of community and care (decolonial).

If we, Evangelical Christians, take that step, we can influence all the dimensions of personal and collective life. With our effort, we can reach there where conventional programmes do not reach. We can achieve community spirituality with a generous, tender, caring identity and sexuality, one of enjoyment with the other. These will be the basis to build more equitable, healthier and responsible relationships and sexual practices.

1. Some contributions by the (Baptist) Theologian Wilfredo Lima, who has discussed the topic about: “Biblical Theological Perspective regarding SRR” in the I National Consultation, La Paz, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

2. Statements and contributions by the Sociologist-theologian, Julio Córdova, (Diagnosis), who discussed the topic “Exercise of Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Bolivia, challenges to an Evangelical spirituality”, II National Consultation, La Paz, 24th August 2012.
- 3 Contributions by the Biblist and Methodist Pastor, Melvy Nina, who also discussed the topic: “Biblical Theological Perspective regarding SRR” in the I and II National Consultation, La Paz, 28th July and 24th August 2012.
4. Ribla 41. Elaine Neuenfeldt.
5. Pointed out by Melvy Nina, in the II National Consultation, 24th August 2012.

# J. The right to freedom of thought regarding sexuality and reproduction

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## **First reflections on a complex issue**

**Abstract:** This paper is a first response to the question, “What does the Bible say about the right to one’s own ideas on sexual and reproductive issues and rights?” Recognizing that the Bible does not speak directly to these issues, stories are brought up in which a person is valued because s/he holds her or his own thinking on a certain matter. Three texts are studied, those of the great woman of Shunem (2 Kgs 4,8-37), the woman with a flow of blood (Mk 5,25-34 and parallels) and Jesus’ “grannies” (Mt 1,1-17).

**Keywords:** Bible. Sexual/reproductive rights. Feminist reading. Gender.

## **Preliminary**

The specific topic in this article emerges from an invitation from the CLAI to provide biblical-theological reflections on “The right to freedom of thought in matters regarding sexuality and reproduction” to the CLAI National Consultation, in its next General Assembly at La Habana in 2013.<sup>1</sup>

It is not a matter of studying only biblical issues concerning the rights of sexuality and/or reproduction, but of studying biblical issues concerning the right of freedom of thought (and action?) related to these issues. The emphasis is, then, double: freedom of thought and issues of sexuality and reproduction. This explains the rather odd origin of my topic for reflection, as well as the colloquial tone that I have used in some expressions, which I hope you can forgive.

## **I. Introduction**

I begin by something which is so obvious that we usually forget. The Bible is not a cookery book with prepared recipes where we can look up “congestion” or “mint” and find a list of recipes (texts) ready to apply. Moreover, we often wonder “What does the Bible say about ...?” and we expect to get an answer. The type of answer that we expect varies depending on our personality, the particular need we have at

the moment, and also, the type of approach to the Bible that we have been trained at (curiosity? confirmation of our pre-judgement? obsession with a problem? Which interpretation is encouraged in our community: literal, fundamentalist, alegorical, socio-political, popular, feminist, dogmatic?). One thing that we should make clear: the Bible does not offer direct answers to many of our current questions, included those of contraceptive methods, abortion, gender, homosexuality and, even less, artificial insemination or sex reassignment surgery. Besides, the biggest concern found in the texts concerning procreation is how to get pregnant, not how to avoid it.

In any case, we must be aware that we are taking a great leap backwards in time (we are not in the VI century BC); in culture (we are not in the Middle Orient); in concerns (did they ones who stoned Stephen, Zarephath's widow, who fed Elijah, Jezebel, Moses, Miriam, the very Jesus, care about the right to freedom of thought in matters related to sexuality and reproduction?) and in forms of production of knowledge (what and how is it taught? What is transmitted? What remains written? What things or events do we not keep written records about?) Each time we try to answer that innocent question "What does the Bible say about...?"

As there have always been people who think differently from those who legislate, there must have been people who were concerned about these issues we address today. But we cannot confirm this as categorically as we would like to. There is not one verse we can directly refer to. We must undertake some fine hermeneutical work before we are able to talk about Sexual and Reproductive Rights and, above all, about the freedom of thought concerning these.

Al least, three aggravating factors add up to what has been said. The first is that we confront controversial topics, around which no one can have a neutral position, even if we take into account the many facets they might present. The second factor is the bodily dimension (including the physical, psychic, emotional and spiritual aspects) in any steps to be taken, be it an action or an omission: either to support a safe and guilt-free sexuality, or to restrict and persecute it, has its consequences; either to offer appropriate information and access to a range of contraceptive methods or to deny them, has its consequences. Even more "public" issues, such as having State policies in favour or against population growth, influence men and women significantly, including their bodies, feelings, possibilities, projects of life. These are not abstract theoretical matters, but decisions which affect many people, especially –although not exclusively- women. Finally, an aggravating factor is that certain church authorities claim they are entitled by God Himself to impose specific sexual and reproductive practices on believers; practices which do not let individuals exert their rights to decide on their own lives, practices which make people be haunted with guilt even if they follow them but disobey deep down; teachings which do not even take into account the life-threatening risks that those decisions entail.<sup>2</sup>

Confronted to this scene, we are not surprised that we still have to fight for such a basic right as the freedom of thought (and action) when it comes to issues regarding one's own sexuality and reproduction. Our task is to discern, therefore, whether the Bible can, and in which/s it can, tell us about the issue which concerns us today. I present now a pathway, made by the undersigned, in the search for answers to this challenge. This does not mean it is the only possible pathway, not even the best one. It is one approach and it is subjected to revision, to cuts or additions. The topic is broad and deserves to be discussed in depth.

## II. General issues

The first thing I thought of is that, since the topic cannot be taken directly, immediately, from the Bible, we must find some general principles on which to assert the rights of each family and/or each person to their own ideas and decisions in matters of sexuality and reproduction. Because if the Bible does not assert the possibility to exercise certain rights over one's body, one's thoughts, oneself, there would not be much to discuss about. That is what I deal with in this section.

The Bible has offered western countries a principle of human equality and dignity, which inspired the well-known motto "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", reached modern democracies and, in the US and some European countries, resulted in women's suffrage, abolition of slavery, literacy and other social progress.<sup>3</sup> I think this is a good way to reach our question because individual rights -among them, the right to decide on one's body and one's sexuality- cannot be conceived without freedom<sup>4</sup>. Where there is no freedom, there is no possibility to exercise any right at all. Whenever a religious or secular power claims for itself the full authority over life and death, over the people's bodies and language (not over their thoughts, but quite close), there is no possibility to exercise any individual right. I think of the countries where there has been compulsory sterilisation; I think of the stoning of women who, due to their culture, cannot decide on their sexuality; I think of the rape and abuse against so many girls and women in dictatorships, in wars, in totalitarian regimes; rape against boys and teenagers boys; I think of the mockery and persecution of men and women who cannot or do not want to follow the "normal" standards (actually, we should say "normative" instead of "normal"); I think of the pregnant women who, for different reasons, cannot exercise the right to decide over their own bodies, their pregnancy, their children (from their impossibility to decide whether or not to conceive, to their impossibility to choose a dignified upbringing for the children, and all the intermediate stages).<sup>5</sup>

Here, we will discuss the value of freedom and the autonomy of men and women who today we will call free citizens, persons who belong to the people of Israel, with rights and duties, identified by tribes and families. Free, but at the same time, servants of their God, since nobody could have conceived something like absolute freedom.<sup>6</sup>

Besides, these people were painfully aware of the constant threat of impoverishment, plagues, wars, droughts and other "curses" which could lead one family to lose their freedom, to have to sell themselves as slaves.<sup>7</sup>

The Hebrew root closest to "freedom" is *jpš*, which appears mostly as an adjective, *jopšî*, especially in legal contexts related to the cancellation of slavery or servitude due to debts (e.g., Jer 34,8-16, where the officials and people in Jerusalem make a covenant and agree to set their slaves free at the siege of the city by the Babylonian army; or Ex 21,2, about the liberation of a slave after seven years of service). Here we notice, again, the socio-political, cultural and religious differences between the Biblical world and ours (mine and that of my readers), at least when it comes to the acceptance of slavery as a socio-economic institution.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a life of dignity, in freedom, a family life, is the biblical ideal, not just a modern concept. It is among YHWH's promises of blessings to his people if they maintain their faithfulness and relationship with their God. (Dt 8,6-10).

Even rest with peace of mind and a private space for “pillow talk” are important signs of the Kingdom for Brazilian Biblicist Nancy Cardoso Pereira. After studying several Psalms (among others, 4 and 6) in the context of the struggle for the people, work overload and constant perils, her study ends as follows:

“We will still have many sleepless nights in this somnambulist continent. At the prison doors, demanding someone’s liberation. The night before the occupation of the land. Roaming the streets, talking to the boys and girls of the night. With the homeless, in the cold of winter, with some coffee [...] Travelling in the early morning to a meeting, a demonstration, a march... However, all those hours of delayed sleep feed from the wish, from the hunger to build living relationships, where the necessary, creative sleep is a right. And one day, to stay awake –at home, in a hospital...- only out of solidarity, to accompany someone being born, someone who suffers, someone who is dying. The sleeplessness of caretaking. And one day, to stay awake –in bed, in a party, on the street, on a plane- only for pleasure. To come close to somebody. To hold each other. To cuddle up. Your shoulder, my bolster; my tears or your sheets. The sleeplessness of loving. At peace. God with us!”<sup>9</sup>

It is true that Psalms do not talk about sexual and reproductive rights, but they do talk about personal and social integrity, which are necessary before even thinking about specific rights. Many psalms recognise the right to physical integrity, fair trials, to claim and reclaim one’s innocence, to not be persecuted, or mocked, to be part of the people and the community. And although we do not have the whole habeas corpus used throughout the years to determine guilt, innocence, punishments and other practical aspects in the old Israel, we do have laws which state that both, men and women are expected to have personal responsibility (to be able to respond for one’s own behaviour).<sup>10</sup>

The Bible itself, which does not spring from a democratic environment, values personal freedom, at least that of the just, honest, upright person. And although we mostly read about the just, honest, upright *man* - just, honest, upright heterosexual, old, wise *man*, lord of his household, heir to the land assigned by YHWH to each tribe-, he is not the only one recognised by the Bible as valuable as a person, as a creature. In this sense, there are numerous texts, beginning by Genesis 1, where we see that the People of God conceived themselves, firstly, as a people created in the image of their Divinity and in his liking.<sup>11</sup>

So far as I can remember, there are no texts which show that one gender, caste or ethnic group have been created as inferior and destined to serve others.<sup>12</sup> It is true that there are texts where people dream of inverted roles, and that the nations which were the oppressors back then, the conquering ones (above all, the great ones: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome) would surrender to the power of YHWH. But these statements, which appear mainly in the prophetic literature, have to do with the dynamics of conquest of one nation by another. In any case, the Bible itself offers amendments to its own ethnocentrism, e.g. when Jesus –on the day of his Ascension tries to make his Disciples understand that there will not be a “Kingdom of Israel” (Acts 1,6-7); or when Paul adds a baptismal formula in his discussion about grace with the Galatians:

“For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you

are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." (Gálatas 3,26-29)<sup>13</sup>

The use of the three binary pairs of ethnics, social status and gender is revealing; he states that in Christ these are not significant differences because every person who is baptised is one in Christ, this proves that these differences did exist at a social level and, possibly, they were also inside the community. But let us not dwell into this text or we would get distracted, let us just say that if the differences in each polarity are abolished (where one term is superior to the other), what remains is a community of people who are different from each other (nobody will quit their gender, ethnicity or social identity) which will share different gifts, different experiences, different perceptions of life with each other. The great difference between "to be in Christ" and to continue along the old paths of "the world" is not to give up being a man or a woman, but to be so in such a way that no man or woman is worth more than the other, that no one prevails. Even if it were the only text we have, Ga 3,28 already opens a door to a community where each individual can exert their right to be unique.

I think we have laid a foundation for us to think of some specific rights. This foundation is the assumption that every adult person is responsible for their acts and can decide freely and with information what is best for themselves and their families.

### III. A possible pathway

Our decisions (regarding sexuality and reproduction, as in other areas of life) taken freely and responsibly are determined, to a great extent, by the socio-economic, family and religious context in which they are taken. These decisions are not taken in a vacuum; they are pondered on and discussed, other actors are taken into account (even if the decisions taken are not liked by them) such as the family, job prospects, housing, health, age, religious teachings. And even more so, in a society like the one reflected in the Bible, where the primary source of identity is the extended family, and not the individual. That is why I agree on the statement that human rights are, first of all, social rights: if we do not have the social framework which entitles us to make use of our rights and to make an informed, conscious choice according to what we deem best, there is not such freedom. María Cristina Ventura Campusano expresses it as follows:

"The Bible as a socio-cultural construct invites us to reflect on the social and cultural realities underpinning the texts. (...) To reflect on human reproduction from these texts requires that I place them in specific socio-cultural and historical contexts; therefore, it is something that must be analysed in the framework of power structures. In this way, it is not just an individual action, but a social one."<sup>14</sup>

Below, I introduce some Biblical texts which allow both, women and men, think as subjects, with the right to their own thoughts and decisions. This list is not thorough, it only tries to offer new clues so as to ponder on these issues which are controversial in our churches. I have classified them bearing the power structures in mind, especially those regarding gender, and I start by quite general categories:<sup>15</sup>

- A) Stories in which a woman is listened to, and accepted as a subject:
  - a. the woman in debt in the company of prophets, 2 kgs 4,1-7
  - b. Miriam, the prophetess, Ex 15,20-21
  - c. Deborah, the judge, Jgs 4-5

- d. the Samaritan, speaking alone with Jesus, Jn 4
- e. the first witnesses of the resurrection, Mk 16,1-8 and parallels
- f. Mary and Martha from Bethany, Jn 11

B) Stories of non-hegemonic men:

- a. The evangelised Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8,26-40<sup>16</sup>
- b. the blind man of Jericho, Lk 18,35-43 and parallels
- c. the many lepers (and others) healed by Jesus<sup>17</sup>
- d. the demoniac man in Gerasenes, Mk 5,1-20
- e. the very Jesus, a poor Galilean whose genealogy is uncertain (even while adult, still identified as Mary's child)

C) Stories of women who demand and assert their rights:

- a. Zelophehad's daughters, Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, Nm 27,1-11
- b. Ruth and Naomi, Ruth 3-4<sup>18</sup>
- c. the persistent widow of the parable, Lk 18,1-8
- d. the poor widow who asks Elisha for help, 2 kgs 4,1-7
- e. Tamar, Genesis 39
- f. Rahab, risking her own life and that of her family to protect the spies, Josh 2

D) Stories of women who become famous for accepting maternity:

- a. Shiphrah and Puah, midwives to the Hebrew women, Ex 1,8-21
- b. Mary, mother of Jesus, Lk 1,26-38
- c. Samson's anonymous mother, Judges 11
- d. Hannah, Samuel's mother, 1 Sam 1-2

E) Stories of women who are saved by other means than maternity:

- a. the woman with haemorrhage, Mk 5,25-34 // Mt 9,18-22, Lk 8,43-48<sup>19</sup>
- b. Canaanite woman (or Syro-Phoenician), Mk 7,24-30 // Mt 15,21-28

F) Stories of women saved by the system by means of matrimony or procreation:

- a. the Shunammite woman, 2 Re 4,8-37
- b. Rahab, Mt 1,5
- c. Sarah, Abraham's wife, according to Heb 11,11-12

It is not necessary to add much about the first category: it includes outstanding examples (not unique, though) of women who were individualised due to their leadership. Although the women who appear in the gospels and in Acts (Mary Magdalene, Jesus's mother, Mary and Martha, the anonymous Samaritan, the witnesses of the resurrection, Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla and others) usually are the best known in our communities, they "walk on the shoulders" of a crowd of female witnesses of God's power and will to work with His creation. The second group includes stories of men who were discriminated by many in their own society, due to a particular situation –an illness, impurity or behaviour. Although the lepers are a paradigmatic case, we cannot ignore other examples of total dependence for survival, as in the case of a paralytic or blind man, which makes them "less manly" in a society with clear gender-based division of work. Or extreme cases of impurity, such as the demoniac man who lived in the cemetery, or the one from whom Jesus expels a legion of demons. (Mc 5,1-20).

The third subdivision includes stories which we have heard or read so much that we even feel familiar and comfortable with, but they reveal a very harsh system towards

certain situations. All these women are in the category “the widow, the orphan and the foreigner”, from Dt 10,18 and others. These examples are women who share the common factor of having lost their source of income and survival as well (land, income), due to their husband’s or father’s death.

Finally, in the items classified as d) and f), I explicitly add the issue of procreation. It is true that it is not the core issue in all the stories, but I do not think I am unfair to them. In d), the story is about the possibility to be a mother by accepting the divine announcement of a future conception. Here, the exceptions are Shiphrah and Puah, since they choose to be in favour of the procreation of Hebrew women, who they help in the role of midwives.

Under “e) stories of women saved by other means than maternity” I gather two stories of women from the New Testament that have an important meeting with Jesus; in this meeting each of them receive the announcement that their faith has granted them what they need and these women’s sexuality and/or maternity is an important part of the story.

Lastly, the stories in category f) differ from one another, but they have one thing in common: the socio-religious system (the Biblical tradition, if you may) has “obliged” them to be mothers or has remembered them only for this fact. It is true that, due to the sharp gender division of social life, the list of women to be remembered for their maternity would be endless if we intended to exhaust it, but I bring up a few special individual cases, such as Sarah, who is remembered for having “received the strength to conceive and give birth to a son in her old age...”

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, *as in a foreign land*, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, *‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.’* (Heb 11,8-12)

Strangely enough, this is not the reason why the other woman, Rahab, is remembered in this chapter, Hebrews 11, but for having hid the spies in Jericho, as it reads in Joshua 2 and 6. It is odd because there is yet another tradition in the New Testament, related to Rahab, which labels her in the category of a “mother”.

As I have already mentioned, my list is not exhaustive, neither as for categories, nor the examples given. Its goal is to provide with a framework to the texts I wish to study. Also, to notify of the great variety of biblical examples more or less related to the issue we are dealing with, and to encourage the debate and study of an important issue, since it deals not only with the dignity, but also the very life of many people, particularly, girls and women.

In this last part, I would like to explore three stories mentioned above. A biblicalist always wonders whether he/she respects the text he/she is working with; honestly, I think texts can give us some help, particularly the last one, to which I devote more time. But we must bear in mind that their focus, their main interest is not our

question on the right to freedom of thought regarding sexual and reproductive issues. In other words, we are asking them to answer a question which is not the one they want to answer. Therefore, we must be cautious not to force them to say something they are not saying.

## Text study

### a. The notable woman of Shunem, 2 Kgs 4,8-37

The first text in our study belongs to the Elisha Cycle. In the books of the Kings appear many miraculous events about Elisha, who was a “Man of God”. The story is simple: a wealthy woman prepares a guestroom for Elisha, so that he can stay there every time he passes by. Elisha wishes to pay back and asks what he can do for her, if she wishes to be recommended to the king or some important official. Since she refuses the favour, Elisha asks her assistant, Gehazi, who mentions that she is married to an old man and they have no children. So Elisha calls her and announces that within a year she will have a child. The announcement is fulfilled but later the boy dies after suffering from a sudden headache, so the Shunammite woman calls Elisha, who resurrects the child. End of the story.<sup>20</sup>

The main topic in this story is the possibility for Elisha to produce a resurrection in the style of his teacher/master Elijah (1 Re 17,17-24). The more unusual the conception, the more important the child, hence, the importance of the drama of his possible early death (if the prophet or his attendant were not capable of preventing it), since Elisha had already declared the birth of this only child.

The reason why I bring this text up in relation to the freedom of thought regarding reproductive issues is the significant fact that it was not the woman who expressed her wish of a son or a daughter. There might have been many reasons for this, from not really wanting to have a child, to believing it was not appropriate to ask for anything out of courtesy; from being realistic and accepting she was married to an old man, to the disillusion after several failed attempts (as her exclamation “...do not deceive your servant” might suggest in verse 16); from considering it a private yearning to considering it could never be included as an alternative in Elisha’s offering. It is also possible to think of her answer from Elisha’s question in verse 13: “Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?” Perhaps, a question on a political note brought up an answer on the same tone from her “I live among my own people.”, I do not need any recommendation. Or, as a biblicist expresses, Gehazi and Elisha “supposed that a child would pay off for the very frequent stays (of both)”.<sup>21</sup>

But what the text tells us about her is that she was a “wealthy woman” (2 Kgs 4,8), generous, “insistent”, or hospitable (depending on how it is seen),<sup>23</sup> prosperous enough as to build a special room for Elisha and reserve it for him. We do know that she wanted to have Elisha as a guest, eating and staying at her place overnight, but we do not know if she wanted a child.<sup>24</sup> A woman who does not ask her husband about decisions on the property where they live, but she takes decisions herself; a woman who is in charge of the decisions about their child (notice how the father sends the sick boy to her, vs 19); and who expresses “I am well where I am, among my own people.” (vs 13).

We must remember that the core of the story is not the right of the Shunammite to her freedom of thought regarding sexuality and procreation, so we cannot turn it

into the centre of the story. However, I think that the text offers a key from which we can explore issues of self-esteem and self-determination, which exert a direct influence on issues of maternity. A woman who feels very well where she is, among her own people, where she has the power to take her own decisions, where her husband listens to her (not to say, accepts her decisions), with a dignified income, does not express –at least, as a priority- her wish to have children. One might say that a woman who is in the same psychological and socio-economic conditions as the Shunammite (whose first reaction is that she is so well that she does not need anything else), is in the position to exert her right to freedom of thought regarding sexual and reproductive issues.

### **b. Rahab the prostitute, turned into Jesus' "grandmother", Mt 1,1-17**

The second text we will study is the genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew 1,1-17. Matthew individualises five women among all the female ancestors of the forty-two generations between Abraham and Jesus (14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the Babylonian exile and 14 from Babylon to the Christ): Tamar, Judah's daughter, Rahab, who gave birth to Boaz (engendered by Salmon, there is no record of matrimony), Ruth, married to Boaz, who gave birth to Obed, who had been Uriah's wife (Bathsheba) before being taken by David, who gave birth to a first child who died and Solomon; and Mary of Nazareth, engaged to Joseph, Jesus' mother.

Even if much has been written about the reasons why these four women are included, and not others, to end up in Mary of Nazareth, what I would like to point out now is that the only discordant fact between this genealogy and the information offered by the Old Testament about each of them is the matrimony and maternity of Rahab, since she is not mentioned again in the Bible after Israel joined the destruction of Jericho.<sup>25</sup> Matthew's Midrashic tendency has long been detected; it is not surprising either, if we take Mary's background into consideration, that some outstanding women were necessary in the history of salvation.<sup>26</sup>

Assuming that it is the same Rahab, I find it particularly striking that there was no other way to "save" a prostitute, other than turning her into a mother within the chosen lineage (presumably, by marriage, although the text does not state that).<sup>27</sup> Not that there were not other worthy women to remember in the genealogy, or that they were not worth including there as mothers; each mother was worthy, as much as every father. And some absences, such as the matriarchs, show that the inclusion of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba has a specific, distinct purpose from that of the certainty of the line of God's Promise to Abraham. What I wish to emphasise is that the Gospels hardly found another form of invoking an ancestor than through an extraordinary case of maternity.<sup>28</sup>

### **c. The women with haemorrhage, Mk 5, 25-34 (// Mt 9, 18-22 y Lk 8,43-48)**

Finally, we get to Mk 5, 25-34, a well-known story in which the healing of a woman with haemorrhage is intertwined with the resurrection of a Jewish young girl, Jairus' daughter (Mk 5, 21-43). This woman has been sick for twelve years, the same as the young girl's age: "she was twelve years of age" (vs.42) but the "already twelve" in the life of a girl who is about to die seem nothing, while the twelve years of a woman who has spent everything on doctors seems like an eternity. We soon learn that she belongs to a family who of believers in the Jewish faith: her father, Jairus,

is introduced as the leader of the Synagogue. We know nothing about the other one, not even if she had a family, if she was a young adult, or an old woman, a believer or not. What we do know is that she has tried it all, she has heard about Jesus, she dares to search for a healing by going after him, that she fearfully confesses what she has done and that she receives the announcement from Jesus «Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease» (vs.34).<sup>29</sup>

When we accept Moya and Renard's suggestion to look at this healing beyond the dogmatic Christological them, we find a whole world of healing between the women and Jesus, a world of popular medicine, miracles and exchange of knowledge and relations. If, thanks to these authors, we can see this scene without a kyriarchal centre (Jesus, the Christ) and an impure female periphery (a despised, impure woman in need), the action of the woman in order to regain her health benefits her, but it also benefits Jesus himself:

“Reciprocity” is the key to discover oneself through the other. The woman who had the strength for healing that her body needed, in turn stimulated Jesus as a healer and in the moment he was touched, he felt an inner strength which he only experienced with her, not with the crowd touching him as well.”<sup>30</sup>

The idea that a little resurrected girl and a healed bleeding woman (part of the group of disciples following him) can play an active role for Jesus and the community, that they can be teachers and healers for Jesus as well, has a great potential for the poimenic mission and even for ecclesiology. These are topics which invite us to delve in the meaning of our lives and our faith.

But let us focus again on this anonymous woman, impoverished due to her illness, marginalised from religious and social life by the restrictions of the legal system about blood, a woman “who has remained within the limits of the views that the religious law imposed for twelve years, acting ‘as God commands’, accepting that her marginalisation was justified and part of that system.”<sup>31</sup> The good news is that this woman got tired. She hit rock bottom because there was nothing left for her to do so as to be cured. Twelve years have passed (twelve! too long, either a symbolic or a real number) among physicians and ritual restrictions.<sup>32</sup> So she joins the crowd of people from the village who gather to see Jesus pass, she takes ownership of her healing power, touches his cloak and, perhaps against any belief, what she was hoping for happens. And she immediately realises that he knows, although he might not know who has gotten that power from him –or does Jesus, perhaps, know who it was?<sup>33</sup> Pikaza ventures to guess a special acquaintance between Jesus and the woman:

“He, too, knows and acts through the body and he bonds with the bleeding woman at that level. Amidst the crowd of curious legalists, both of them feel connected by the body. (...) at that level, Jesus knows that, beyond the ones who oppress and put pressure at a physical level, a person has touched him and asked him for help(...)”<sup>34</sup>

Bodies asking for help and bodies offering possibilities. In the end, this is what salvation and resurrection are about, the resurrection of the flesh. Bodies that seek to be healthy, strong, feel alive. But at times, as we are reminded in many stories in the Gospels (and Acts of the Apostles), and in our own stories, bodies do not manage to feel well. Therefore, material and human production and reproduction become more difficult and even impossible.

“The discussion on human reproduction immediately makes us think of the importance of the bodies of women, men, girls and boys. Concerning this, Mk 5,21-43 reminds us of the conditions that women’s bodies should have so that reproduction –also related to production- can take place.”<sup>35</sup>

Their own bodies, such as the woman with a haemorrhage, or the bodies of other people, such as Jairus’ daughter. The bodies of anonymous mothers, as Jairus’ wife, relegated to her home, but in charge of the production and reproduction in the family; the bodies preparing for maternity, like the 12-year-old girl –provided she survived to her serious illness- and the bodies which have spent their best years bleeding, denying any possibility of reproduction. In this way, I find Ventura Campusano’s intuition very interesting, as she sees an example of resistance to maternity from both, the dying girl and the woman with a haemorrhage:

“Both cases, the woman with a haemorrhage (for twelve years) and the (twelve-year-old) girl seem to be a form of resistance from women and girls to fulfill the established duties, fertility and marriage. As we have said, it is not that the acts of Jesus free them from these functions, rather than Mark possibly collects the acts of many women and girls of the time. In that sense, despite being old enough to fulfill functions, they do not have to do so, and they can be healthy and reproduce their lives.”<sup>36</sup>

We can easily imagine a girl’s resistance to be categorised in adult roles, especially if, as we suppose, she would have to leave her home to take part in her husband’s family, a husband almost as young as the girl. As for the woman with a haemorrhage, it is more difficult to see only one social pattern reflected in her, bearing in mind that she must have gone through many different feelings, wishes, expectations and reactions during the twelve years of suffering, unfruitful medical visits and much loneliness.<sup>37</sup> However, the author does not contemplate this in individual terms, but as a reflection of the forced situation in which certain (many or few?) women found other useful roles in society, besides maternity.

It is not difficult either, to imagine diverse scenarios where this woman might have been involved during those 12 years. If her family (if she had one) was accused of “mingling” with sinners and impure people, her daily life would be less complicated than if she came from an environment which rigidly observed the laws and customs (as we can imagine the family of the leader of the synagogue, Jairus). And by “daily life” I am referring to every aspect of daily life, from sharing a seat or a bed, to touching people. So we can speculate on situations ranging from a still relatively young woman (did the haemorrhages start at puberty?) to an already middle-aged woman (had she had children before she became ill? no one appears by her side in the story); from a woman living on her own, to having a family (closely related or less close); and from a strict, ritual isolation to an observance “in public” but not at home (note that Lv 15,24 also refers to the impurity transmitted by the menstruating woman during seven days to the man she sleeps with, with which the law recognises the possibility that not every community would observe the taboo of menstrual impurity).

In any case, I am very sure that this woman made use of her right to the freedom of thought regarding sexual issues. I am not kidding. Isolation due to impurity (for any person, not just a menstruating woman) was assured twice, from the affected person towards her/his environment (note in Lv 15,8 the possibility of an impure spitting another person and passing on her/his disease) as well as from the environment

towards the affected person (“anyone who touches...” Lv 15,5-11). That is why a woman with a haemorrhage knew that she could not go near other people without “infecting” them with her impurity. She knew that everything she touched would remain impure and she should refrain from going near pure persons as well as the sacred.<sup>38</sup> With this, I intend to emphasise the active role of a woman with a blood flow, taking care for so long not to infect anyone (at least in public) and finally, doing the opposite, touching Jesus’ cloak, weighing the risks of her daring and transgressive attitude. Her own needs, her extreme suffering and isolation, together with the possibility that the miracle worker passing by would help her, show (perhaps, restore) her freedom to question a religious and social system which restricted her sexual and reproductive possibilities to an extreme.

I do not think it is wrong to talk about freedom of thought regarding Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the case of haemorrhages. It is true that it is not about the right to decide on contraceptive methods. It is about deciding on one’s own sexuality because her illness was not leprosy or blindness, but gynecological haemorrhages. These had important consequences in a woman’s life, including an active sexual life or the absence of such, with the impossibility to conceive. When this woman tries to heal her illness by touching a man, an act which will make him impure according to the symbolic-religious model of her society, she is actively involving her sexuality; obviously not in a literal way, I am not saying that she made any open exposure before Jesus or that she provoked him. However, she is openly challenging a ritual system which condemned her to isolation for being a woman and menstruating (even if she had not suffered from haemorrhage), and to give up before an illness for which there was no cure despite having spent everything she owned on physicians.<sup>39</sup>

I am not the first one who perceives that Mark gives the woman with haemorrhage an active role, interrupting Jairus and Jesus in their dialogue and achieving (demanding? Taking ownership?) her cure before Jairus’ dying daughter. After 12 years as a patient, she turns impatient and at the same time, she turns into an ex-patient now completely healed. Mark recognises her strength, via her faith, to revert the usual relationship between doctor and patient:

The healing mechanism does not only revert the dynamics of power between doctor and patient, but it also subverts the traditional models of contamination. As W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison put it “Instead of uncleanness passing from the woman to Jesus, healing power flows from Jesus to the woman.” Both the Levitical laws of purity which have segregated women from society and the failure of physicians to cure the woman become powerless. The woman controls the leaky doctor.<sup>40</sup> (See Lv 15,7-11; Nm 5,1-5).<sup>41</sup>

Without a doubt, we need a few words to explain a “leaky Jesus”. The author notices that in the encounter between Jesus and the woman with a haemorrhage there is a parallel which is often unnoticed, which is the woman’s flow turning dry as she touches Jesus’ cloak and the flow of power or energy which pours from Jesus to the woman at the same time. In the light of the common Greco-Roman models of disharmony or illness, this author shows that: a) there is a parallel movement of flows between the woman and Jesus (one flow begins and the other stops), b) there is a philosophical or scientific (reflected in well-known Greek authors) concern about the permeability of bodies, which produces illness or weakness; c) a body which does not hold its fluids is sick or weak and compared to the female body: such as the woman’s body before being dried and the body of Jesus himself when he loses power; and finally, d) Mark reverts the negative charge in this polarity,

Male= dry = impermeable = healthy  
Female = humid = leaky = in disharmony or sick,

since permeability was also considered a sign of divine presence.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Mark manages, on the one hand, to present a feminised Jesus due to his passive role in front of this woman, but on the other hand, a divine Jesus, due to the power that He emanates, which allows him to expel the legion of demons, cure the bleeding woman and resuscitate the dead girl, all in one chapter: the beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God!

## Conclusion

This article is based on a talk with a specific topic, that is why it is more contextualised than if it had been a reflection on a specific biblical text. I do not apologise for that, since the hermeneutic circle, as every good circle, allows us to begin by any of its parts. It is an unfinished article, in the sense that it suggests an initial pathway to approach an issue which is a combination of complex topics (the Bible, human rights, reproductive rights, sexuality) both in biblical times and today.

But at the same time, our everyday reality with its challenges (in this case, the ones related to the right to freedom of thought and decision on such sensitive and moving issues as sexuality) and the members of our churches interested in a broader, critical faith, demand answers from theology. I have shared my first answer.

There are no biblical texts which refer directly to the problems of birth control or abortion. If there appears some concern, it is exactly about the opposite: the absence of descendants (especially boys), undervaluation of female infertility (especially where there is more than a wife competing for the privileged position), the promise to become a large people. We cannot either state, based on the silence of the text, that they did not know any potions to abort or methods to determine the right time to conceive or prevent conception and in general, remedies for different ailments; besides, exposure of unwanted children was a common practice.<sup>43</sup>

Since there is no direct evidence, I have chosen a few texts which could shed light on a discussion that surpasses the biblical realm but which can also benefit from the Bible. The topic can be approached from several possible angles, such as freedom of thought, freely accepted maternity, esteem towards women independently from maternity, among others. I have chosen three texts to go in depth. Firstly, the story of the wealthy woman from Shunam whom Elisha rewards for her hospitality with a son that she had not asked for; the second, Jesus' maternal genealogy, where four well-known ancestors before Mary –Jesus' mother, are listed. Finally, the woman with a haemorrhage who was healed by touching Jesus' cloak.

Among all of them, this isolated and impoverished woman afflicted with haemorrhage for twelve years is the one that offers us more to learn. There is plenty of richness in the various Mark commentaries. I would like to conclude by saying that her challenge to the imposed rules of society by going near Jesus and touching his cloak without asking for permission or asking him to heal her is a clear example of her freedom of thought regarding issues of sexuality and procreation (the latter conveyed by the haemorrhage as the impossibility to conceive). The story shows us that Jesus likes a faith which places one's own needs in the first place (at least regarding health, integration, integrity and well-being). Thanks to faith and its action, Jesus

can restore health and new life to Jairus' daughter. Thanks to Jesus' words, the bleeding woman experiences from healing to going in peace and saved<sup>44</sup> Even when to do so, she must defy the restrictions of the patriarchal system that limit her "right to freedom of thought regarding issues of sexuality and reproduction": Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease." (vs.34).

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- 1 I work more in workshops than lectures, since I believe that the study of the Bible is enriched by the contributions of each participant. I would like to thank the group contributions (National Consultation, 23/6/2012), some of which I have taken part in, as you see in the notes.
- 2 I do not wish to extend on this matter because, albeit serious, it is not the core topic. I will only mention the pressure exerted on legislators and the public by the church in our country, Argentina, via the mass media and demonstrations regarding issues of reproductive health and the project of decriminalisation of abortion, to name just a few.
- 3 I do not deny the value given to life by other religions, nor do I wish to make a triumphalist proclamation, since the Bible has also been and is used to justify racial discrimination, slavery, imperialism and other evils. Here I wish to focus on what the Bible, as the sacred book adopted by the Roman Empire and its successors (sadly, taken in their conquests as well) has handed down to us, philosophically and symbolically, when it comes to dignifying all human beings.
- 4 According to the 22th version of the DRAE (Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy) 2001, the first definition of freedom is "Natural faculty of the human being, to act in one way or another or not to act, for which they are responsible for their acts." (<http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=libertad>).
- 5 Sonia Corrêa and Rosalind Petchesky, "Direitos Sexuais e Reprodutivos: uma Perspectiva Feminista", ("Sexual and Reproductive Rights: a Feminist Perspective) 2Physis [online] vol. 6, n. 1-2 (1996) 160 (147-177), accessible (15-06-2012) at: [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=So10373311996000100008&lng=en&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=So10373311996000100008&lng=en&nrm=iso), suggest four ethical principles as the basis of all sexual and reproductive right: physical integrity (the right to security and control over one's own body), personal autonomy (the right to take decisions they deem are best, well-informed and being heard about their own experiences), equality (for both, men and women = gender, as in relation with other women = social class, ethnic group, etc., which raises a problem when it comes to reproductive rights); and diversity (cultural, social, religious, age-based, family-based, health-based).
- 6 The very fact that the noun 'ebed' means both slave and servant and is used to identify both the slave without rights and the honorary name (e.g. Moses in 1 Chr 6,34) shows a conception of the relationship with God and other human beings very different from ours. By the way, this complicates our research greatly, since it offers an ambiguous terminology.

- 7 And there were also people who were kidnapped, subdued or sold that would possibly never regain their freedom (although there are some stories like Joseph's in Egypt and some laws such as "Goelato" (the custom that, in the case of death, a near relative would inherit the property if there were no children or siblings), which show that at least theoretically, it was possible to regain the status of "free").
- 8 It is true that I am making certain assumptions here, such as being free persons, with citizenship rights, etc., assumptions that might not be necessarily correct.
- 9 Nancy Cardoso Pereira, "To sleep at peace: condition of hope. Prayers of anger and serenity", RIBLA 39 (2001) 56 (52-56), [www.ribla.org](http://www.ribla.org)
- 10 We cannot carry out an in-depth analysis of all the laws here, but a division by gender is evident, which does not mean that they were perceived as unfair in those days. Certain laws do not apply to men in the same way as they apply to women. Ex 21,1-11, e.g., contains two similar cases, but contrary legislation. While a Hebrew man with debts is not allowed to regain his free life after six years of service, the same law does not apply to the Hebrew woman, since she has become her master's concubine and will not be free. One of the main problems here is language, since supposedly similar terms like "slave man" and "slave woman" convey different obligations and relationships. But it is not only a matter of language, as Dt 15,12ss picks up these laws again and modifies them in a new situation: "If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and works for you for six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free." This law in Deuteronomy equals the slave man and the slave woman from a different social situation than that in the Covenant Code in Exodus.
- 11 It is true that there are also discordances, since Genesis 1 does not differentiate between Israel and the rest of the nations (it is not that God created the heavens and earth, vegetation, animals and only Israel), but the law we have does not deal with Hebrew free men and Hebrew free women in the same way, or with Hebrew men and Hebrew women sold for the payment of debts, or with the "foreigner, the widow and the orphan", or with foreign slave men and foreign slave women.
- 12 I dare to claim this although many people might immediately think of Genesis 2 and interpret the expression of the divine wish, 'ezer kĕnegdo', which allows the separation of humankind into men and women as the intention of creating woman as the servant of man. But it is not so: there is no man or woman before the separation, besides the emphasis on the expression in the equality (kĕ + neged = to be at the same level) between both halves.
- 13 Unless stated otherwise, the biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version – Oremus Bible Browser, at <http://www.devotions.net/bible/oobible.htm>
- 14 María Cristina Ventura Campusano, "Con temor y temblor –Reproduciendo la vida negada: una lectura de Marcos 5,21-43", RIBLA 57 (2007): 96-110. I use the version online, available at: <http://www.claiweb.org/ribla/ribla57/tirsa.html> under Reproducción humana and Marcos 5,21-43.

- 15 This list is the result of my own reflections and that of the groups of work during the CLAI Consultation (23/6/2012); other texts have also been mentioned that I do not bring up in this material as they would distract us too much, but which I am very thankful for. Some texts would fit in more than one category, depending on the point where they are read or how they are interpreted, e.g. the story of Tamar and Judah can be interpreted as her claim to the right to a son, or it can be included among the stories of saved women (as in remembered) for their maternity.
- 16 There is much discussion on the meaning of the term “eunuch” (heb. s rîs, gr. eunûjos); the most common is the one of a man to whom sexual relationship with women is forbidden, but it often may mean (as Luke states in this text in Acts of the Apostles) a high official in a foreign court.
- 17 There is also a wide selection of stories of the OT, which involve impoverished peasants due to droughts, or particular groups affected by misfortunes (serpents) or even bears or lions used as instrument of the prophets. Although in many cases the religious, ethnic or socio-economic situation of the people involved is not specified and, hence, we cannot know if these were nonhegemonic, we can state that they are (temporarily) placed in an extremely vulnerable situation, so they need divine help; e.g., life-threatening serpents (Numbers 21), Miriam’s leprosy (Nm 12), Moses’s hand, which turns leprous and heals during a conversation with YHWH (Ex 4,6-7); the mark on Cain (Gn 4,11-16) and, during prophet Elisha’s cycle, from people being able to eat when Elisha “cures” the poisoned pot (2 Kgs 4,38-41) to leprosy, which passes from one person to another (2 Kgs 5,27).
- 18 During the discussion of this text in the abovementioned Consultation, the question was raised of how problematic is Naomi’s plan to send Ruth to lie down with Boaz (Ruth 3, 1-4) compared to today’s procuring or pandering which uses the same argument (“go, lie down and do what the man says so that things go well”) to make women believe that there is no other way for survival. In this sense, I think it is very important to be aware that such an innocent suggestion for many readers may be really dangerous to other groups, that cultural contexts in history and our times are very different and besides, the book of Ruth offers other survival strategies, through regaining family heredity and matrimony (of course we can also question the validity of matrimony as a means of survival for women; but, again, there is a cultural abyss between Ruth’s world and ours).
- 19 The key to think of this text was provided by the title of the article published by Marcia Moya R. And Helmut Renard, “The nameless and manless woman who saves herself”: “Woman, your faith has saved you” (Mark 5,25-34)”, RIBLA 49 (2004): 46-57. The quotes are from the online version, available at [www.ribla.org](http://www.ribla.org).
- 20 Naturally, much more can be said about this story as well, but that would divert us from our goal. .
- 21 Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel. Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children*, Nashville, Abingdon, 2008, p. 90.

- 22 It is true that we find her twice, considering the possibility of disappointment. The first, when Elisha announces that she will give birth to a child in a year, she replies, “No, my lord, O man of God; do not deceive your servant.”(vs.16); the second, when her son falls sick and she reaches out for Elisha and expresses, “Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, do not mislead me?”(vs.28). Anyway, the fact is that the text does not record her need for a child.
- 23 The Hebrew term which describes her action in vs.8 is *wattajäzeq-bô*, causative of the root *jzq*, “exert force, force, press”.
- 24 Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, “The Great Shunammite Woman and the Man of God: A Two-Part Interpretation of 2 Kings 4:8-37”, en J. Bekkenkamp & F. Dröes, ed., *The Double Voice of her Desire: Texts by Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes*; translation by David E. Orton, Leiderdorp (Netherlands), Deo, 2004, p. 151: “Let us find out what objective(s) the woman had. This is clear in the first scene. She wants Elisha to have a meal in her house. Then she wants him to stay there whenever he comes to Shunam. She achieves her objectives in both cases. And then, she does not have any further wishes. Her answers to Elisha’s repetitive question about what he can do for her are elusive.” This is a version from 1989 translated from the Dutch, reproduced posthumously. There is a very similar version, “The Great Woman of Shunem and the Man of God: A Dual Interpretation of 2 Kings 4.8-37”, en Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, pp. 218-230.
- 25 See e.g., Mercedes Lopes Torres, “Mujeres que se inventan salidas (Mt 1,1-17)”, *RIBLA* 25 (1996), pp. 52- 68; John C. Hutchison, “Women, Gentiles, and the messianic mission in Matthew’s genealogy”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 no. 630 (2001), pp. 152-164. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (acceso: 19-7-2012); and Helen Bruch Pearson, *Mother Roots: The Female Ancestors of Jesus*, Nashville, Upper Room Books, 2002.
- 26 Yair Zakovitch, „Rahab als Mutter des Boas in der Jesus-Genealogie (Matth 1:5)”, *Novum Testamentum* 17 (1975), pp. 1-5 traces Rahab’s tradition as mother of Boaz through various Rabbinic traditions and concludes that the author of the Gospels must have lived fully immersed in them or, at least, he/ she knew them very well. See also Peter S. Hawkins, “God’s Trophy Whore”, at Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, ed., *From The Margins 1: Women of The Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives*, Sheffield, Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009, pp. 57-60.
- 27 It is surprising from a current gender-based reading, but it was a common practice in the previous (or even contemporary) Rabbinical exegesis to Matthew. Richard Bauckham, “Tamar’s Ancestry and Rahab’s Marriage: Two Problems in the Matthean Genealogy”, *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995), pp. 313-329 states “A specific form that the Midrashic desire adopted was to find husbands for those female figures whose husbands are not specified in the Bible. Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, or Miriam, Moses’s sister, must have married, undoubtedly, illustrious men who appear in the Biblical story.” (323)
- 28 Unlike, for instance, John the Baptist, compared to Elijah (Mt 11,11-15), Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Mt 8,11) or Daniel (Mt 24,15 // Mk 13,14). There are a few exceptions: Mt 12,38-42 // Lk 11,27-32 includes both Jonas’ sign before

which Nineve converted and the sign of the Queen of the south; Lk 4,25-27 favours the widow of Zarephath before the Hebrews.

- 29 Symmetries have been found long ago (both coincidences and contrasts) between women in these two situations of disease and health; it is not surprising, since Mark himself presents one account inside the other. See recently Rodney Bomford “Jairus, his Daughter, the Woman and the Saviour: The Communication of Symmetric Thinking in the Gospel of St Mark”, *Practical Theology* 3 (2010), pp. 45-46; Bomford analyses them on the basis of the theory of symmetrical thinking, developed by psychoanalyst Ignacio Matte Blanco.
- 30 Moya and Renard, “La mujer que sin nombre”, under “La mujer que ‘padecía flujo de sangre’ se sana y salva a Jesús.”
- 31 Moya and Renard, “La mujer que sin nombre”, under “La mujer que ‘padecía flujo de sangre’ se sana y salva a Jesús.”
- 32 Xabier Pikaza, “Las mujeres en el Evangelio de Marcos” (Aula de Teología, Santander, 8/XI/2005) [online] available at <<http://www.unican.es/NR/rdonlyres/63D6CF9E-8224-4045-9892-B39ABF80EABF/0/3LasMujeresenelEvangeliodedeMarcosProfXPikaza.pdf>>, bajo 3. The haemorrhissa (woman with an issue of blood). He calls her, besides, a woman without human cure, lonely woman (since her impurity isolated her from other people, esp. Priests) and a woman who knows and understands with her body (pp. 3-4 of 19).
- 33 I think there is a very interesting element of suspense in the fact that Jesus has now lost an important portion of his power when he is on his way to resuscitate a dead girl: will he be able to do it or has the contact with the haemorrhissa weakened his ability to perform miracles?
- 34 Pikaza, “Las mujeres en el Evangelio de Marcos”, under 3.5 Jesus radiates purity and purifies the woman as he is touched (5,30-32) (p. 4 de 19).
- 35 Ventura Campusano, “Con temor y temblor...”, under La reproducción en peligro –cuerpos amenazados, historias que se juntan.
- 36 Ventura Campusano, “Con temor y temblor...”, under Revelación de la vida negada –dos mujeres en reproducción.
- 37 I do not wish to engage in controversy with the author, but I wonder how many women in similar circumstances to those of the haemorrhissa (woman with a flow of blood) must have lived their non procreation as a resistance to established models, even in turbulent times such as those of the first centuries of the Christian era.
- 38 Candida R. Moss’ comment “The man with the flow of power: porous bodies in Mark 5:25-34”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010), p. 508, n.3 (507-519) is intriguing: “For the argument that menstruation was not impure or socially isolating in ancient Jewish society, see the fascinating analyses of Shaye J. D. Cohen, (“Menstruants and the Sacred,” en *Women’s History and Ancient History* [ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991], 273-99”. Unfortunately, only a portion of this article by Cohen is available on the web, but I believe I understand that the author states (p. 278) that, despite the laws of Leviticus 15, there is no clear evidence that any Jewish group

in the second temple period isolated their women from society. It does show how the prohibition of access from any impure person to the sacred, including the synagogue, began to develop on the basis of the Mishna.

- 39 The interpretations about these words in the text (that she had spent all her money on physicians without any results), are several and I do not intend to delve in those here, since they do not relate directly to my topic (although they are certainly one of the causes of anguish, denigration and injustice, both in the past and currently). I found Frederick J. Gaiser's comment, "In Touch with Jesus: Healing in Mark 5:21-43", *Word & World* 30 (2010), p. 10 (5-15) very appropriate, as he notices that Jairus must have spent everything he had on doctors to save his little daughter and finally both (Jairus and the bleeding woman) fall at Jesus' feet as their last resource at the margins of society.
- 40 The original term is "leaky", an adjective which means that something is leaking or losing its content through holes. The author states in a previous note that she chooses a pejorative term because the term indicates a failure, something that loses where it should not. And goes on: "The more acceptable theological concepts that Jesus 'emanated' or 'radiated' power give porosity a positive connotation. By inappropriately using a term related to physical weakness I wish to emphasise the contrast between the human and the divine conceptions of porosity." (n. 31, p. 516).
- 41 Moss, pp. 516-517. Her quotation (n.33 in her text) is from vol. 2 by Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1991, p. 130, but quoted by Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 27, New York, Doubleday, 2000, p. 367.
- 42 Moss, pp. 514-518, views the text in the context of Greco-Roman models of the body; the model of harmony between cold, hot, dry, wet (Galenus) and the model (Celsus, Theophrastus) of the invasion (of demons) due to excessive permeability of the body.
- 43 Number 57 of the Latin American Biblical Interpretation magazine is devoted to the issue of "Human reproduction: complexity and challenges". See esp. the articles by Elaine Gleci Neuenfeldt, "Errores e itinerarios de la sexualidad, de los derechos reproductivos y del aborto –aproximaciones bíblico-teológicas"; by Adriana Kuhn, "Como una colcha de retazos –Observaciones sobre la vida y la persona en la discusión sobre el aborto, a partir del Antiguo Testamento"; by Shigeyuki Nakanose "Líbranos de nuestra humillación (Isaías 4,1) – Mujeres y reproducción en el Primer Testamento" and by María Cristina Ventura Campusano, "Con temor y temblor ..." mentioned above.
- 44 Gaiser notices this, "In Touch with Jesus", 8: "The woman does touch Jesus and immediately she was healed of her disease (vs. 29) – 'healed'... but not 'made well' or 'saved'... only in conversation with Jesus; only in conversation that is open and honest, telling Jesus 'the whole truth' (vs. 33); only then, from the mouth of Jesus, is she 'made well' (vs. 34). This move is important to rescue the story from an interpretation that makes the healing automatic, dependent on physical touch alone (...) 'Wellness' or 'being saved' comes only in the personal encounter with Jesus that involves words, communication, and promise."

## K. What the Bible calls us to do, when confronted with the situations of femicide suffered by women in Puerto Rico<sup>1</sup>

*Sarah González López*<sup>2</sup>

“Both read the Bible day and night. But thou read’st black where I read white.”

William Blake

*The everlasting gospel*

### **Introduction: Of paradoxes and justifications**

To judge femicide from a biblical perspective might seem simple at first sight. We are facing a violent death and in the Old Testament God pronounced Himself against violent death in both the story of Cain and Abel and in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. But the Bible, as Phyllis Trible (theologian and Biblicist) points out is like a pilgrim, a “witness of the complexities and ambiguities of human existence.”<sup>3</sup>

As a witness, the Bible gathers accounts where violent death seems to be justified. We find laws which stipulate death of the couple who committed adultery in Dt. 22:22 and Lv. 20:10. Or stories like Jezebel’s, a woman cursed by the Israeli people (2Kgs. 9:30-37) and turned into a symbol of adultery in Revelations 2:20, for her bravery to insist in practising her religious traditions. Or the death of Jephthah’s daughter in Judges 11, presented as a holocaust to show gratitude (for the bloody victory over the Ammonites) to a God we had been told did not need any human sacrifices. Judeo-Christian society until our days, supported on these and other stories, has paradoxically used the Bible to legitimise violence.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, to be able to judge violent deaths using the Bible, requires tools which allow us to go beyond simple appearances. When it comes to femicide, this experience turns even more complex, since the problem is closely related to gender-based violence. We are obliged to start by analysing how the issue of gender-based violence has been addressed in the biblical accounts and the interpretations of these.

The feminist biblical hermeneutics offer tools for this, since the cross-cutting theme in their methodology is precisely, gender. It poses questions to the texts and history about the situation of women and their role in society. The questions are enunciated at a level of suspicion that should be applied to the traditional reading and interpretation of all biblical passages where women are subjected to violence, placing the responsibility for the evil on the patriarchal society with its definition of power. Besides using the element of suspicion, feminist hermeneutics appropriates Jesus' primitive movement, as well as his practice of justice as a model to follow.<sup>5</sup> It is fueled by a guideline called "beyond academic prudence", which adds some audacity (supported by our own daily experiences) when it comes to interpret the texts. Even some attitudes of Jesus are questioned. I call it "level of suspicion II". Of course, analytical methodology is not exhausted here, but it will suffice for our immediate purposes.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Bible and Diachronic gender-based violence**

We will begin by the founding text in Genesis chapter 1 and 2 where we find two accounts of the creation of woman.<sup>7</sup> In the first, both man and woman are created simultaneously in the image of God, which states that a principle of equality must nourish human relations (provided that this image of God is interpreted in an integral way).<sup>8</sup> In the second chapter we find clues to the problem of gender-based violence. Eve, the first woman, is created from Adam's rib. We are suspicious of this symbolism, for it holds a completely asymmetrical anthropological view which favours man. It is the classical patriarchal interpretation. Woman is undervalued. Adam owns everything, his own body, including his "ex-rib" because she is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the text was written within the Yahwist tradition which legitimised the patriarchal culture. It is an account at the service of the rest of men, since it has been read, reread and canonised in this way, in the letters of the New Testament, the Church Fathers, to the present day.<sup>10</sup> In Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21, the woman, like the house, the servants and the animals is the property of the husband. But it is also the property of all men in the cultural mindset. As owners, they can handle the possessed object at their whim and convenience. This has been identified as one of the causes of violence. It aggravates when, supported in the conclusion of the account in Genesis 3, it gains strength with the rhetoric and symbology in which Eve is perceived as a sinner and temptress and disobedience is related to her sexuality.<sup>11</sup> Eve will be represented by all women in the collective mindset.<sup>12</sup> Sexuality becomes a taboo and part of the oppression exerted. The mere reading of the laws of chastity and the death penalty by stoning in Dt.22 horrify us.

Further ahead, in Judges 19, we find an account titled as "horror text" by Tribble, which confirms the two approaches about violence mentioned above.<sup>13</sup> In that text, a woman is offered by her husband (owner) to be raped and later is cut into twelve pieces to summon the people of Israel to go out to battle against the people of Gaba. Besides, the account adds the double victimisation, which aggravates the gender-based violence. The woman becomes the expiatory goat for the tense relationships between the two peoples.

The history of biblical interpretation holds record of some women from feminist movements and also theologians who have questioned and continue questioning the use of the Bible, due to its hostile and oppressive nature towards women.<sup>14</sup> Confronted to this outlook, we pose the question again: how can we judge on the ethical issue of femicide with full Christian integrity, using the Bible?

We can already outline two of the answers. When judging feminicide, we must recognise two facts: (1) the Bible has been written and interpreted on the basis of the patriarchal model which invests men with power (patriarchy) and (2) women's sexuality is at their service (sexism).

## **Gender perspective and feminicide: Jesus before the threat of feminicide**

Our pilgrimage with the Bible as witness in the process of discernment prior to judgement, takes us to the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels; we find a text which might help us to offer a few answers, it is the story of the woman caught in adultery (Jn.7:53-8:11), since Jesus is about to witness a feminicide.<sup>15</sup> Like the text in Judges 19, besides death, there are other issues relevant to feminicide, such as sex, power and double victimisation.

The story belongs to the larger section of chapters 5-10, where we find Jesus defying the laws of Sabbath rest and it has parallels in Mt. 19:3-9, in which he is confronted with the laws of Moses.<sup>16</sup> The scribes and Pharisees were annoyed at Jesus: he was healing sick people on Saturday, an action which had given him a reputation. They try to catch him with both, Judaic and Roman law. The passage tells us clearly that the woman is being used as an excuse. If he was to condemn her, he would be accused before the Roman authorities, since according to the Roman laws, Jews were not permitted to put anyone to death by the Roman laws (Jn 18:31). But if he was not to condemn the woman, they would accuse him of being a traitor to the Jewish laws. From our feminist view, the woman is doubly victimised. She is an object at the service of these men's malice. We cannot forget that on reducing this woman to an object, her body also loses its sacred dimension. We are suspicious of the title assigned to the biblical versions as well. It is the woman who is accused. Her sexual partner is not on the scene, he is not even mentioned here, a widely replicated experience in patriarchal societies, which treat men's responsibility very lightly when it comes to sexual infidelity (in patriarchal societies, men are often characterised by their "disrespect")

As for the personal situation of this woman (the rough time she went through must have been more than enough), we do not know whether her marital status (was she married and unfaithful?) gives her the status of adulterous. Neither do we know, if married, whether her husband was exemplary or an abuser. Perhaps adultery was her only way out.<sup>17</sup> If she had been a prostitute (synonym of adulterous, to many people), we would have to find out whether she is a prostituted woman, a victim of the same society which pushes many women to this type of conduct. But neither do we know if she engaged in prostitution as a personal choice, a sensitive issue, not alien to the human "complexities and ambiguities".<sup>18</sup> Whichever perspective we see it from, this woman was denied the right to own her body, one of the important issues regarding reproduction and rights that we stand for from our feminist view. Based on the Mosaic law we all know (Lv. 20:10 and Dt. 22:22-29), the woman caught in adultery should be executed, and the usual way was by lapidation, but the man, who does not appear in the scene, should be stoned as well. To this, we add that according to other passages, such as Dt 17, more than one witness must appear in order to validate the testimony. Here, several witnesses appear, in order to comply with this law. I cannot imagine how so many people could catch a woman in the act of adultery; it is obvious that this incident had been schemed before, against Jesus and against her, for being a woman.

At this woman's life-threatening situation, Jesus intercedes in favour of life. He realises (analyses) that these men, using law as an excuse, are capable of killing a human being only to be able to judge him. He does not lend himself to the farce and confronts them without fear. He also realises that the group of men do not see the rafter in their eye but they certainly see the straw in their brother's and especially, their sister's.

At the peak of his prophetic vocation, Jesus points out their lack of sensitivity and conscience and intercedes in favour of the woman. His answer is categorical and becomes a clause with practical effects: it abrogates death penalty for adultery: Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone...". With this statement, he saves her life.

The statement also brings about a paradigm shift from the point of view of who we are, as humans, faced to sin and what the law is for. It teaches that guilt is not restricted to one group –here, the adulterous woman. Guilt is corporate: all of us are involved. Jesus also showed them that the law is not for allowing death, but life and it must be interpreted within a profoundly humane, caring and equalitarian justice frame. It made them discern and rethink, guiding them along the path of repentance. Vs.9 states "When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him." Jesus changed their way of thinking, shifting it towards a new conscience which makes them cease feeding their malicious desires against both, the woman and Jesus. Therefore, Jesus' attitude is a liberating one, also to the victimisers.

### **What does the Bible call us to do on the basis of this account? A God in favour of life and justice.**

So far we have pointed out several guidelines which might enlighten our pilgrimage in the act of judging. Jesus, as a prophet, had to focus on preventing evil and he did so. He managed to prevent the femicide of a woman accused of adultery, which many cultures still justify. Our analysis requires that we do not simplify the problem. We know that gender-based violence is the precursor of femicide and this awareness is vital. Therefore, patriarchy and sexuality are two fundamental issues to be added to social critique from a feminist perspective.<sup>19</sup>

The second stage of prophetism has to do with intervention through reporting. Jesus did this with great skill. In our case, we must identify the cultural factors that trigger violence towards women and report the crimes in all their nuances. In order to do so, we must have an articulate discourse, supported by trustworthy facts. It is also necessary to build social and ecclesiastical structures where we can listen attentively to the contents of those reports and be ready to take action.

The third stage of prophetism invites to "active repentance". He did it with words that raised awareness and sensitised those men so as to judge themselves first. In our case, we must work with work proposals that raise awareness of this evil. We must work with the victims and their family and social environment and the victimisers as well. It requests us to recognise that the entire society takes part of, and is responsible for the problem; I believe that, as in the case of the adulterous woman, all of us are guilty. Therefore, this is not a particular problem of the "secular" world, the church is summoned as both, judge and party.

Lastly, we have Jesus' answer to the woman, with which the story ends. This allows us to be a bit daring in our interpretation and go beyond academic prudence.<sup>20</sup> It even allows us to challenge Jesus himself with our own experiences, as the Syrophenician woman did. The phrase "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."<sup>21</sup> has been very controversial, to the point that many state it could never be said by Jesus, but by the later tradition, when the church began to pay special importance to the issue of repentance, above all if it had to do with a capital sin as adultery was and is.

This line of thought reveals the little solidarity in the phrase, not in accordance with the Jesus we are proposing as model.<sup>22</sup> If we accept some of the premises mentioned before as possible, we can understand the line of thought behind this negative statement. We wonder what the future might bring to this woman after that profoundly traumatic experience. A future where she is sent, after Jesus' command "Go your way", without the necessary tools to face it. She is going back to the same social context where the scribes and Pharisees were. They had changed, but the rest of society had not. We also wonder, if she had a husband, how would he react when she returned home? Would he choose to kill her and null all the work Jesus had done? Anyway, we know that the severity of mistreatment –if he was an abusive husband– would be even greater without an adequate therapy. And if she was a prostitute, how would she handle her financial life from now on? The value that our imprudent reading adds to our exercise today is the self-critical dimension which must always be present to discern objectively. We must be careful about what we do with the victims of domestic violence. Where do we lead them to with our advice and our solutions? Because many of them, after what they consider an excellent therapy sessions, are killed in the next corner as we did not provide them with the appropriate tools.

## **The size of my hopes**

Yet, I can also point out another important aspect when expressing my judgement. Within the practise of self-criticism there is a ray of hope. Despite the limited social frame –the reality every human being experiences and that Jesus could not be withdrawn from either– he manages to give this woman back something that men tried to take away from her: her dignity, her body and her life. From a human rights perspective as we interpret them today, there is significant progress. He places her before the "hope" of a new life, a "possibility" to build a future free from sin, which, from the Christian perspective, is what we all should aspire to after an encounter with Jesus. "That is the size of my hope, and I invite you all to become gods to work for its fulfilment" as Borges said<sup>23</sup> Here is where Jesus fulfils his redemptive mission. Otherwise, Jesus would remain in the gallery of the prophets, since he would not have surpassed Elijah (with whom he was mistaken), or John the Baptist (who stated straightforwardly that he was not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals) and he would not deserve to be called the Son of God.

We are called, then, to encourage meeting spaces that stimulate a culture working for the restoration of women's right to life, today threatened by gender-based violence and femicide. Meeting spaces which promote a healthy human coexistence that cannot take place as long as there is one single victim. To achieve all this, political advocacy is crucial.

Finally, to fulfil our redemptive mission, the Bible invites us to read it again and again so as not to perpetuate interpretations which incite violence. Therefore, we

cannot leave aside our practise of feminist hermeneutics when we approach the Scriptures. We must continue our labour by reporting those biblical interpretations which come from a patriarchal cultural background and perpetuate violence against women. Our sons and daughters must learn these tools in the same way that they memorise biblical texts in Sunday school. It is necessary to continue educating both pastors and laity on this task, because only then will we discover the divine plan outlined in the Genesis, where Eve is confirmed as the ideal help (*ezer-kenegdo*), which does not include any statement that Adam is her owner but instead, a call for relationships of mutuality and solidarity towards a culture of peace.<sup>24</sup>

This is what the Bible calls us to do: to judge with sensitivity and recognise that gender-based violence is an extremely serious social evil, opposed to the divine plan because this is what hinders our full development as human beings in his image. And this social evil worsens when it ends up in feminicide. Seen from a faith-based perspective, both –gender violence and feminicide- are sins that should be reported and fought –first of all, by prevention- and that the Bible, when interpreted responsibly, can accompany us in our pilgrimage, not just as a witness, but also as a guide in our processes of discernment.

- 1 “What is feminicide about? Feminicide, since we got permission to translate it as such into Spanish, instead of “femicide”,(which would simply mean murder of women), is an analytical category of political theory and it consists of approaching the problem as part of gender-based violence against women. This is the first epistemological, theoretical and political assumption and to place it there is to approach the causes of feminicide”. Conference in the University of Oviedo, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2006. Published with the permission of its author in [www.mujiresenpr.com](http://www.mujiresenpr.com) Diana E.Russell and Roberta A. Harmes, *Femicide in Global perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001) . Translated into Spanish as *Feminicidio: Una Perspectiva global*. (México: Centro de Investigaciones Intedisciplinarias y Humanidades, UNAM, 2006),12, where Marcela Lagarde y de los Rios is the presenter and states: “Feminicide is a tiny visible part of the violence against girls and women; it happens as the end of a situation defined by the repeated and systematic violation of human rights of women. Its common denominator is gender: girls and women are cruelly abused solely for the fact of being women and only in some cases, they are murdered at the end of such private or public violence”.
- 2 This essay is a contribution to the second part called “judging” in the methodology we suggested for the topic: Causes and pastoral challenges before feminicide, to be read on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2012 in the coming event at Centro Buen Pastor in San Juan. The activity is sponsored by the National Board of Puerto Rico and is the prologue to the CLAI Assembly to take place in Cuba in 2013.
- 3 Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978),1.
- 4 The history of the people of Israel oscillates between God’s mercy to justified violence in the name of the same God. It is a history marked by the patriarchal vision of a people that is the object of God’s love and seeks its freedom as the “chosen people”, but declares itself to be the “owner of” and justifies many types of violence on the grounds of that designation.

Christianity has also legitimised its Evangelical proposal with acts of violence. The conquest and colonisation, the crusades and processes of inquisition and witch hunting ended in death. Today, in the XXI century, when the struggle for human rights is a daily activity, inquisitions continue happening among the ecclesiastical leadership. The Spirit that blows where it wishes and how it wishes and assures us that we have been called to freedom instead of servitude, still remains a prisoner of the patriarchal power structures, allowing space for violence. See recent publishing by theologian Ivone Gebara at <http://www.redescristianas.net>. EEUU: la inquisición actual y las religiosas norteamericanas, abril 2012 y Gal 5:1y 13.

- 5 In order to understand what the movement of Jesus means and its ideological implications in depth see: Rafael Aguirre, *Del movimiento de Jesús a la Iglesia Primitiva* (Navarra: Editorial Verbo Divino: 2001).
- 6 For an excellent summary, see: Ute Seibert Cuadra, “Leer la Biblia con ojos de mujer,” *Revista: Testimonio* No. 143 (mayo-junio 1994): 17-25. The quote “beyond academic prudence” was coined by Elsa Tamez.
- 7 Diachronic refers to a chronological approach to the problem.
- 8 It is the sacerdotal account which points at the natural order and not at the patriarchal culture. Carmen Bernabé, “Biblia” en *10 mujeres escriben teología* (Navarra: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1993), 18.
- 9 “my” accentuated by myself.
- 10 Passages like 1Cor.14.34 “women should be silent in the churches”, and 1Tim 2:11-15, which call for the submission of woman to her husband and to learn in silence because she was formed after Adam, are some examples. We have also found Tertullian, who defines women as “the door to the devil”. See: Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books), 63.
- 11 The forbidden fruit is related to sexuality because they found they were naked. But the one to blame is Eve, since it was her who offered the fruit to Adam. With this, we have contaminated the erotic dimension in our couple relationships. Women, as sin-committers can be mistreated to death and their sexuality is included. See also: Tribble, 72-143
- 12 The passage in 1 Tim 14 includes the fact that Eve is to blame for the transgression.
- 13 Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 65-92.
- 14 From its beginnings, feminist theology has confronted this type of difficulty, which began with Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s protest from the end of the XIX century. Leading figures such as Mary Daly in the XX century gave up the biblical text. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s comment is emblematic: “Whatever the Bible may be made in Hebrew or Greek, in plain English it does not exalt or dignify woman.” Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Revising Committee, *The Woman’s Bible* Seattle: Seattle Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 1974), vi-xviii.

- 15 The passage is commented from a woman's point of view at : G.R.O'Day, "John", *The Women's Bible Commentary*. ed. Carol A, Newsom and Susan H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). The word *μοιχεία* refers to both adulterous and prostitute. From the *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, 2002, s.v. "adulterio" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2002, "adultery").
- 16 See: Raymond E. Brown, *Introducción al Nuevo Testamento*, Tomo I (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2002), 457. Also Armando J. Levoratti, dir., *Comentario bíblico latinoamericano Navarra: Editorial Verbo Divino*, 2003), 634-635.
- 17 Hisako Kinukawa, "A Well Cherished but Much- Clouded Story," in *Reading From this Place*, Vol. 2, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 82-95.
- 18 The topic of prostitution is highly controversial. It is currently being discussed within the sphere of the sexual and reproductive rights. In a recent programme of TVE (Spanish television), in April 2012, there was the testimony of a prostitute who was fighting together with a group, for the right to practise their trade. I have also looked into the full history of courtesans.
- 19 We must question the whole social, institutional and political structure represented in the matrix of events of gender-based violence. This means to weigh the legal and political issues in order to unmask the subterfuges which perpetuate these crimes and hinder the appropriate application of justice. On some occasions the laws will have to be fixed but on others, these will have to be abrogated. It also implies educational processes in all competent institutions, such as the home, the school and the church.
- 20 Seibert Cuadra, 23.
- 21 Jn 8:11 (Versión Biblia de Estudio. Mundo Hispano).
- 22 Kinukawa, 82-96.
- 23 Jorge Luis Borges, *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (The Size of My Hope) (Barcelona: Editoria Seix Barral, 1994), 14.
- 24 By examining texts in this way, chapters like Judges 19 would make good excuses to present the problem of femicide from our pulpits. Other texts, read from the same viewpoint, would help to raise awareness of the ramifications of evil and some would even open up to the possibility to be used to present situations of gender-based violence –not only physical- which is a cause of death and which extends its tentacles of collateral damage within the family and society. Texts like Hagar's, Sarah's, Tamar's (from Judah), David's daughter, Tamar's, David and Bathsheeba and many others which show power abuse, psychological abuse, and other experiences based on gender problems.

## L. Reading between the lines in the discussion about religion, state and sexual and reproductive rights

*Romi Márcia Bencke*

### **Summary**

Although Brazil is constitutionally a lay state, the discussion about the relation between religion and state is frequent. This debate becomes more forceful when the items on the agenda are service and fulfilment on the part of the State, to the demands presented by the women's movement –especially the ones related to sexual and reproductive rights. In this context, we perceive a porous zone between religion and state in Brazil, which shows that the separation between these two spheres did not result in the privatisation of the religious, or in the mutual exclusion between both, religion and politics.

This Brazilian-style laicism presents some challenges to the relation between state and religion. If women's rights are not extended, it favours their invisibility and criminalisation, so it is very important to debate about these challenges.

**Key words:** Laicism. Religion. Women.

### **Sexual and reproductive self-determination – the establishment of a right**

The various processes of transformation caused by modernity did not mean overcoming the social, economic, political and sexual inequalities experienced by women. The story of women's struggle has been a constant forging of revolutions within revolutions.

Nevertheless, even if the statement above can be considered true, it is possible to say that, on the one hand, the modernisation which took place from the XIX century onwards did not contribute to the substantial liberation of women, but on the other hand, it allowed women to take action and claim their status of citizens and subjects of rights.

When we analyse the consequences of the French Revolution, we perceive that, on the one hand, this event stressed the borders between public and private, enhanced the value of the family and emphasised the difference of sexual roles by highlighting the opposition “political men” and “housewife”; on the other hand, it limited the paternal powers, recognised divorce and proclaimed individual rights. The debate around divorce brought up the issues of “liberation” of unhappy couples, the “emancipation of women from their submission to their husbands and the freedom of consciousness for Protestants and Jews who did not prohibit divorce”. And, precisely, it is in the wake of these contradictions between traditionalism and modernisation that the notion of women’s sexual and reproductive self-determination is established and acknowledged as a right.

The liberal-democratic ideal of reclaiming rights was the main feature of the feminist movement from its beginning, engaging in battles in different fronts along its different phases<sup>1</sup>.

Around 1830, English feminists discussed issues related to birth control. In this context, the term “sexual self-determination” began to be used. This view comprised that women were able to decide whether they wanted or not to have children, and suggesting that women should be in control of their own bodies. The background to this discussion was that birth control should not be seen solely as the perspective of social and political emancipation of women, but it should also contemplate their needs to have access to information about sexuality and sexual satisfaction. Under the principles of equality, personal autonomy and bodily integrity, they were claiming their right to be considered as subjects with the freedom to plan and organise their lives.

The book “The second sex” by Simone de Beauvoir, in 1949, contributed substantially to confronting the structures of traditional plausibility<sup>2</sup> by expressing criticism against the control of the body and by formulating the first concepts related to ownership of “re-ownership” of their body by women. In this book, the author criticised biological determinism and divine fate, understood as the determining factors of procreation as women’s social function. The role of maternity was questioned. Also, thesis about sexual freedom and the liberalisation of contraception were presented. Issues that used to belong to the private sphere began to be politicised.

These new views about the social role of women confronted the symbolic universes which reigned and gave meaning to one of the main social institutions, the family. The human construction of family reflects the “structure of the cosmos” (Berger, 1985, p.47), in this sense, the specific family roles attributed to man and woman are invested with eternity and not subject to change. Fatherly authority and care, for instance, imitate the gods’ authority and care (BERGER, 1985, p. 51). Family, throughout history, has been the privileged space for “reproduction of male views and domination” (BORDIEU, 2007, p. 103).

Religion, in turn, regulated and legitimised this thinking, assuming its role of “monopoly of ultimate legitimisation of the social and collective life”. (BERGER, 1985, p.147). Quoting Bordieu (2007, p. 103), the “Church inculcates (or inculcated) a familial morality entirely dominated by patriarchal values and, mainly, by the dogma of innate inferiority of women”.

The so-called sexual revolution, which took place in the sixties, mainly in Europe and the United States, contributed to strengthen and expand the notion of sexual and

reproductive self-determination. The struggle for access to contraception and rights expanded and was supported by the discussions about the choice of maternity, effectively separating sexuality from reproduction. Debates about such issues as maternity, marital relations in the domestic space and violence against women raged on. The emblem that “people are also political” became popular. (SCAVONE, 2004, p. 29).

At first, the idea of sexual and reproductive self-determination was linked to health. In the eighties, the concept of women’s reproductive health was explained in detail, involving all the aspects related to reproduction: contraception, abortion, prenatal, childbirth, breast and cervical cancer, STDs, adolescent pregnancy, among others.

Later, two World Conferences organised by the UN contributed to the process of expansion of the concept of sexual and reproductive self-determination.

In 1994 took place the Cairo World Conference on Population and Development. In this Conference, Brazil made a commitment to ensure women the control over their own fertility. Paragraph 73 of the final text in this Conference expresses that sexual and reproductive human rights mean the recognition of the basic right of all persons to decide -freely, responsibly and on the basis of safe information- on the number and spacing of their children. To ensure sexual and reproductive rights also means, according to this document, to have the right to take decisions about reproduction freely and responsibly, without discrimination, coercion or violence (LIMA e RODRIGUES, 2012 p. 05)

This Conference is acknowledged as a historical milestone regarding sexual and reproductive rights, since it has enabled the formulation and approval of the Cairo Programme of Action, which declared that “reproductive health includes the capacity to enjoy a satisfactory sexual life without risks” (RIOS, apud LIMA e RODRIGUES, 2012, p. 6).

The second one was the IV World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing in 1995, where the Brazilian Government made a commitment to ensure the right to non-procreative sex, besides reviewing the laws that punish women for terminating pregnancy. (LOREA, 2006, p. 190)

The commitments made by Brazil in those two Conferences have not translated into guaranteed public policies directed to sexual and reproductive rights. One of the factors which hindered the realisation of these Programmes is the intervention in the political sphere of groups with religious interests. This characteristic of Brazilian society and politics has a direct influence on the assurance of women’s rights to the extent that the National Plan of Public Policies for Women states secularism as a principle, by declaring:

“The public policies directed to women must be formulated and implemented regardless of religious principles, so as to ensure the rights enshrined in the Federal Constitution and the international instruments and agreements signed by Brazil”<sup>3</sup>.

## **The consequences of the porous Brazilian secularism in the guarantee of sexual and reproductive rights**

Throughout three centuries, the territorial control of Brazilian politics was kept “by privileges accorded by the ‘Padroado’<sup>4</sup> to the Portuguese Crown” (MONTERO,

2011, p.1). This relation of privileges was the cause of at least three important consequences for the formation of the religious sphere and the current configuration of the public space.

The first one was to perceive Catholicism as the political language of the Colony and the Empire. It was not uncommon that priests were in the bureaucratic structures of the State (MONTERO, 2011, p. 1). The second consequence was the configuration of a relatively autonomous popular Christian faith, as a result of the great territorial extension and insufficient state and ecclesiastical control mechanisms. And the third was that Christianity, through Roman Catholicism became the reference paradigm for the assessment, control and education of popular practices, both in the religious sphere and in the public one. In this way, “catechism and civilisation were perceived as interchangeable public politics until, at least, the first half of the XX century” (MONTERO, 2011, p. 2).

Throughout two periods, Colonial and Imperial, the Church exerted a strong influence over moral education, imposing rigid rules of conduct. These rules were approved by the Imperial Government, even when its rule leaned towards moderate liberalism (CARVALHO, 2012, p. 28). The Church devoted special attention to the sexual behaviour of the population. Sex must be only for procreation purposes.

From its beginnings, Brazil was characterised by cultural diversity, formed by indigenous, African and European population and by extreme economic and educational inequality. It is estimated that in the Imperial period, 85% of the population was illiterate (CARVALHO, 2012, p. 35). In this context, the practice of abandoning unwanted children was common. As for abortion, even when this was practised, it is discussed whether it was a frequent practice. It is possible to detect that this procedure was practised but in the most silent way, since women were afraid of being imprisoned or processed under the Inquisition. At the same time, many manuals of the Church described and condemned the indigenous practices and beverages used for termination of pregnancy. The Church tried to control and condemn abortion through the confessionary, trying to identify women who, by chance, had terminated their pregnancy. (DEL PRIORE, 1988, p.55). These women were given sentences such as: three years of punishment in the cases in which abortion had been voluntary. Or penitence during three periods of Lent if it had not been voluntary. (DEL PRIORE, 1988, p. 55).

In 1830, the Penal Code of the Brazilian Empire was drawn up and it had two specific articles devoted to the criminalisation of abortion, based on the view that life starts at the fertilisation. These articles were in the chapter “Two crimes against the security of persons and life”. According to these articles, it was a crime to provoke an abortion, independently of the method which was used. Any accomplice of a woman who had an abortion was punished as well. The punishment would be double if the procedure had taken place without the pregnant woman’s consent. (PIERANGELLI, APUD PREDEBON, 2007, p. 20).

Regarding the influence of the Catholic morals over Brazilian society Prebedon (2007, p. 22) remembers that women’s behaviour was regulated by the Papal Encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, from 1880. This encyclical, presented ten years before the Brazilian Constitution, reaffirmed the domestic codes of Ef. 5.21-24, declaring that the husband was the head of the family and the woman should subject to her husband, as a companion, so that her honour, dignity and obedience were guaranteed towards him.

The importance of woman's honour as a fundamental condition to guarantee the integrity of the institutions of matrimony and family was categorically reaffirmed in the Penal Code of 1890.

In the 1934 Constitution, the Magna Carta took into account the principle of "reciprocal collaboration" between State and Religion (GIUMBELLI, APUD ORO, 2011, p. 225). This created the space for the Churches to intervene in matters of education, health, leisure and culture (MICELLI, 1988; MARIANO, 2001, p. 146 APUD ORO, 2011, p. 225).

Sylvestre (APUD MARIANO, 2011, p. 250) has noted that while evangelists defended the secularisation of the state, they demanded that the governmental authority should be presented as submissive to divine sovereignty. Perhaps it would be illustrative to consider the fact that in the preamble of the 1988 Constitution appears the expression "under God's protection". From the beginning, they stood for issues such as: non decriminalisation of abortion and drug consumption, same-sex union and immorality, religious freedom and demands for concessions of television and radio stations, besides public resources for their religious organisations. (PIERUCCI, 1989; FRESTON, 1993 APUD MARIANO, 2011, p. 251)

The entry of Pentecostals in politics broadened the religious influence in the political arena, making Brazilian secularity even more porous. Besides this, it strengthened the mechanisms contrary to abortion, as politicians from Pentecostal communities joined Catholic politicians to prevent the promulgation any laws threatening to decriminalise this practice. A clear example of these mechanisms was the debate around the decriminalisation of termination of anencephalic pregnancy, which clearly showed the polarisation between defenders of the secular state and those in favour of religious intervention in Brazilian politics.

When we observe the historical records, we note that the religious discourse on maternity as a divine gift contributed to solidify the understanding that the woman's role in society was procreation. The direct link between Colonial and Imperial State contributed to foster the "myth of legal protection of life from conception" (LOREA, 2006, p. 187), used even today, together with the right of defense of religious liberty guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, articles 5 and 19.

The experience in Brazil shows that, even when a state declares itself as secular, this does not necessarily mean the end of contacts and exchanges between the public and religious dimensions. This is an ideal project. Ranquetat (2010, p. 174) points out that the history of the Western world is marked by connections and proximity between the public and religious spheres. The religious and the politician represent poles or forces which establish permanent interactions and pervade diversified domains of society.

The question lies in the limits of this proximity. We also wonder –from Hervieu-Léger (2008, p. 229) if religious liberty can also be considered an absolute right. Which are the acceptable limits of religious liberty?

Remember that the guarantee of religious liberty is present in a broader context, which is the guarantee of a person's fundamental rights. Within that group of guarantees lie the rights of women and other groups as well.

As in religious liberty, sexual and reproductive rights are inserted in the modern understanding of individual autonomy and private liberties. The exercise of rights involves the right to personal freedom, which in turn, demands social obligations. These involve the public sphere, and it is the State which must guarantee the adequate conditions assuring that the rights are safely exerted by all citizens. In the case of women, that means that the decision to have or not children belongs to the private sphere of the woman or the couple, but it is the duty of the state to guarantee the necessary conditions so that this decision is taken in a suitable manner.

### **Religions and Sexual and Reproductive Rights – a current dispute**

Daniel Hervieu-Léger (2008, p. 33) points out that one of the fundamental traits of modernity was its separation from tradition, stating that the person becomes the legislator of their own life, able to determine the orientations they want to give to the world they live in. The process of rationalization promoted the specialization of the various domains of social activity.

From this understanding it can be said that the separation of church and state was understood as a civilizing conquest, by emancipating the temporal order of religious tutelage. This separation became relevant to ensure full accomplishment of civil liberties, individual rights, tolerance and social plurality. The separation between religion and state has not presented itself as a form of opposition to religion. This separation sought to avoid the continued subjection of the state to the interests of religious institutions. It was generally the religious institutions the ones which legitimised the political institutions.

These convictions are what gradually fostered the process of secularisation in many Western countries helping many churches to begin their fight for human rights, especially after the two world wars.

However, as noted by Steil and Toniol, (2012, p. 76) the understanding of human rights has expanded, taking over new issues, going beyond the struggle for social justice for the poor. The new issues raised by human rights movements include topics such as sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights. This shift in understanding redirects the action of many religious groups, which now show their unconditional defence of the rights of the embryo, expressed through the discourse of the right to life, the defence of heterosexuality and family (Steil, TONIOL, 2000, p. 76). This shift demonstrates that there are different views about the nature of human rights. The very notion of social justice also happens to be understood differently. According to Berger (2000, p. 23) what is justice to one is injustice to others.

The increase in participation of women and LGBT's rights advocacy groups in the human rights movement causes significant clashes to arise in the conceptualization itself for these rights. These clashes are polarized between positions of those who want the expansion of individual rights and those who want to keep more conservative positions. This dispute revolves around the recognition or not of the embryo as a human being, the right of women to decide on their body, the principles of procreation and pleasure, in civil union between persons of the same sex (STEIL, TONIOL 2012, p . 77th).

The greater involvement of secular groups in the human rights movement and the weakening of the influence of religious groups in this space make certain religious institutions increasingly lean towards ensuring their values through political lobbying.

Therefore, the alliances established between political parties and groups in the search for votes contribute to this, strengthening the mutual instrumentation of religion and politics, the legitimisation and encouragement of political-party activism by religious groups and religious occupation of the public sphere. (MARIANO 2011, p. 251). This makes the Brazilian government most often back off in the discussions about the approval of public policies, in particular the ones about the expansion of sexual and reproductive rights.

It is interesting to observe that this change occurs in a process of deinstitutionalization of religions. Hervieu-Léger (2008, p. 42) notes that churches no longer control the values which their believers are identified with. To this author (2008, p. 42), the split between religious belief and religious practice represents reveals the gradual regression of the regulatory power of the institutions that historically entitled themselves as guardians of faith and morals. The author also states that modern believers tend to break with the institutional framework devices.

This trend can be observed in Brazil, where a large majority of people declare themselves to be religious but do not necessarily identify with the values held by the religious institution to which they belong. This behaviour is illustrated by research conducted by IBOPE in 2010<sup>5</sup>, at the request of the organization Catholic Women for the Right to Decide. The research took place in 140 municipalities and heard 2002 people. The goal was to identify whether the Brazilian population was favourable or not to abortion taking into account the circumstances in which the pregnancy occurred. The results showed that almost 70% of interviewees agree on a woman interrupting pregnancy when it means a risk to her life or when the foetus has no chance of survival after birth. Of the interviewees, 52% agree on the right of a woman terminating a pregnancy resulting from rape. For 96% of the interviewees, it is not the role of the government to arrest women who have an abortion under the conditions described above, but rather to provide care at public hospitals. For 61% of the interviewees, it is up to the woman to decide on the termination of an unwanted pregnancy. Regarding the role of social institutions such as Church, Congress, Judiciary and the Presidency of the Republic, only 5% of interviewees believe that these institutions have the function to determine whether or not the woman should interrupt a pregnancy.

The question that arises is how to understand the religious intervention in the political sphere so as to ensure the protection of values that are not consistent with the thinking and worldview of the largest part of society.

In a scenario characterized by the loss of control over subjectivities by religious institutions, it is important for them to find new spaces of power that enable the imposition of their values. The political arena becomes, therefore, a space of dispute. In this sense, we could suspect that the efforts of religious groups in different parliamentary fronts could mean an attempt of survival of a type of Christianity whose values are no longer supported by the society.

It is worth remembering Berger's observation (BERGER, 2000: 10) that secularisation generates movements of anti-secularisation as a consequence. One also remembers Machado (2000, p. 12) who notes that the expansion of individual rights generates conservative positions. This may help to understand that over the years 1949-2007 42 projects related to sexual and reproductive rights about family planning, contraception, sex education and ensuring license according to legal abortion

were presented. Out of these projects, nine followed their normal course and 33 were shelved (PREDEBON, 2007, p. 40).

The Proposed Amendment to the Constitution - PEC 143/2012 - receives support from the parliamentary religious, an amendment which alters the provisions of the Federal Constitution, and the PEC 03/2011 proposing the possibility of the Legislature to halt acts of the Judiciary that “exceed their duties.” The motivation for developing this PEC was the approval by the Superior Federal Court of the decriminalization of abortion in cases of anencephalic pregnancy.

The dispute of religious groups for the prevalence of their views may be one of the indicators for a possible realignment in the relationship between religion and politics, besides indicating that religion has been taken into public ownership in the political and social spheres. (MARIANO 2011, p force. 254)

Norberto Bobbio (APUD RANQUETAT 2008 65) emphasises the character of coexistence in the term “secularism”. To this author, the secular spirit does not mean a new culture, but the condition for the coexistence of all the cultures that make up a nation. For him, secularism expresses more of a method than the contents. It is important to note that secularism is a political term, and not a religious term. There is a dialectic in this method, since it guarantees the free exercise of religion while limiting religious action in public space at the same time..

By observing the historical struggle to ensure the expansion of sexual and reproductive rights for women, we understand the importance of the consolidation of secularism in Brazil, which was one of the foundations of the National Plan for Public Policies for Women as well.

More than the debate about the relationship between State and Religion, the data shows that expanding the policies regarding the sexual and reproductive rights of women has to do with the recognition of the right to existence. Data from the IBGE census of 2010 showed that 93% of women declare that they belong to a religion. This data could serve as a stimulus for religious institutions to rethink their stance on women’s rights. The non-revision of the public policies for women contributes to the deaths of a significant number of them. In Brazil, it is estimated that one in five women die from complications arising from abortion. The indexes on the Maternal Mortality Trend for 2008, and released by the United Nations, show that 358,000 women die annually in the world, due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth. This means that a thousand women die daily due these complications. Thus, one could say that the intervention of religious groups in regard to the expansion of sexual and reproductive rights may indicate the continuation of a historical practice against women by the churches. This practice implies to disown them into invisibility, scapegoating, discrimination and the restriction of their rights.

## Conclusion

Just as with religious liberty, sexual and reproductive rights also fall under the modern understanding of individual autonomy and private liberties. The exercise of rights involves that of personal freedoms, which in turn, demands social obligations. These involve the public sphere, since it is the State that must grant appropriate conditions which are capable of ensuring that the rights are exercised in a safe manner by all citizens. For women, this means that the decision to have children or

not belongs to their private sphere, being the duty of the State to ensure the necessary conditions for such a decision to be exercised appropriately. It is necessary for the State to have full autonomy to implement public rights and policies capable of ensuring access to services that grant women safe decision making.

The ambiguity surrounding the secularity of the Brazilian state prevents it to fulfil its function fully, since religious groups interfere in most cases where there are policy proposals related to improving the sexual and reproductive rights.

The question about the reason why religious groups have acted in such a categorical way to stop the implementation of these policies, in a scenario characterized by the deinstitutionalization of religions, leads to an assessment of the ongoing process of secularization.

It is suspected that the militancy of religious groups to prevent the adoption of public policies related to sexual and reproductive rights, could mean an attempt for survival by a Christianity whose values are no longer supported by the society. This dissonance makes the political arena to become a privileged space of dispute. With this one could say that the intervention of religious groups in regard to the expansion of sexual and reproductive rights may indicate the continuation of a historical practice of the churches towards women, which is to disown them into invisibility, scapegoating, discrimination and restriction of their rights.

We must ask for the meaning of religious freedom. For Hervieu-Léger (2008, p. 205) this freedom cannot be claimed as a right, except to the extent that this claim states full compliance with the human rights of other social groups.

- 1 The historical development of the feminist movement is generally classified into three waves or phases. The first one is women's struggle Liberal Movement, which claimed the equality of civil, political and educational rights. It is worth highlighting the voting movement in this first phase. The second wave took place in the sixties and seventies, a period influenced by the discussions of North American and French feminists. The former stressed the urgency to denounce the oppression of women by men and the struggle for equality. The latter emphasised the importance of valorising the differences between men and women. The feminist proposals which highlighted equality were called "Equality Feminism", while the ones highlighting differences were labelled as "Difference Feminism". From these two aspects, the concepts of equality and parity were introduced in the feminist debate. The third wave emerges in the eighties, under the influence of the poststructuralist thought, especially Foucault and Derrida. The issues of differences, subjectivity and uniqueness of experiences grow in importance. Studies on gender relations are emphasised.
- 2 According to Peter Berger, subjective reality depends on specific structures of plausibility. These structures are the social foundations which confirm the identity in which an individual recognises himself/herself. This identification needs a milieu that confirms it. These milieus are the conversational apparatus whose function is to maintain, modify or reconstruct an individual's subjective reality. For instance, a man who identifies himself as superior to woman and therefore, with the power to dominate and subjugate her, will maintain this self-identification through linking and interaction with reference groups that confirm this vision. (BERGER, 2012, 196, 198.)

- 3 Plano Nacional de Políticas Públicas para Mulheres, (National Plan of Public Policies for Women). p. 7.
- 4 The “Padroado” granted powers to the governor to: name the priests for ecclesiastical functions, open churches, etc.
- 5 The research is available at:  
<http://www.catolicasonline.org.br/outros/EstadoLaico.pdf>.

## ANEXOS 2

Canciones para celebrar

### **Todas las voces todas**

Armando Tejada Gómez

Salgo a caminar por la cintura cósmica del sur  
Piso en la región más vegetal del viento y de la luz  
Siento al caminar toda la piel de América en mi piel  
y anda en mi sangre un río que libera en mi voz su caudal  
Sol de Alto Perú, rostro Bolivia, estaño y soledad  
Un verde Brasil, besa mi Chile, cobre y mineral  
Subo desde el sur hacia la entraña América y total  
Pura raíz de un grito destinado a crecer y a estallar  
Todas las voces, todas  
Todas las manos, todas  
Toda la sangre puede ser canción en el viento  
Canta conmigo, canta  
Hermano americano  
Libera tu esperanza con un grito en la voz  
Todas las voces, todas, todas las manos,  
Toda la sangre puede ser canción en el viento  
Canta conmigo, canta hermano americano  
Libera tu esperanza con un grito en la voz.

### **Sí, vale la pena vivir**

Elga García Casillas

Yo puedo cantar canciones  
con mucha alegría  
yo sueño que el hambre nunca nos haga sufrir  
Yo espero un mundo lleno de ríos y flores  
y todo porque vale la pena vivir.  
Sí, vale la pena vivir  
en este mundo que Dios hizo por mí  
vivir rodeado de amor, de gente buena y en paz  
Sí, vale la pena vivir.  
Sí, vale la pena vivir  
con esperanza haciendo al mundo feliz  
es por Jesús mi canción y por su amor es mi amor  
Sí, vale la pena, vale la pena.  
Sí, vale la pena vivir  
Yo puedo cuidar el mundo  
que Dios nos ha dado  
y sueño que no haya guerras ni luchas sin fin  
Yo quiero todo mi pueblo unido de manos  
y todo, porque vale la pena vivir.

(Elis García, Rubis Camacho, Puerto Rico)

Fuente: Red de Liturgia del CLAI

<http://www.clailiturgia.org/si-vale-la-pena-vivir-1893.html>

### **¡El Cielo Canta Alegría!**

//El cielo canta alegría, aleluya  
Porque en tu vida y la mía  
brilla la gloria de Dios//

*//Aleluya, Aleluya,  
Aleluya, Aleluya//*

//El cielo canta alegría, aleluya  
Porque a tu vida y la mía,  
las une el amor de Dios//

*//Aleluya, Aleluya,  
Aleluya, Aleluya//*

//El cielo canta alegría, aleluya  
Porque tu vida y la mía  
proclamarán al Señor//

*//Aleluya, Aleluya,  
Aleluya, Aleluya//*

### **No nos ilumino**

No nos iluminó para dejarnos regresar,  
Nos llevará a la tierra que nos prometió.  
Y que ninguno de sus hijos viva con temor,  
nos llevará a la tierra que nos prometió.  
Y que ninguna de sus hijas viva con temor,  
Nos llevará a la tierra que nos prometió.

### **La Mano de Dios**

La Mano de Dios, en nuestro Mundo está,  
Actuando con gracia y con poder,  
La Iglesia quiere ver, el gran acontecer,  
De la poderosa mano de Dios.  
La mano de Dios, en nuestro mundo esta está,  
Creando una nueva sociedad,  
Con paz, con hermandad, justicia y libertad,  
Por la poderosa mano de Dios.  
La mano de Dios, en nuestro mundo está  
Mostrando su modo de vivir,  
Servir, también sufrir, por nosotros aun morir,  
Por la poderosa mano de Dios.  
La mano de Dios, en nuestro mundo está,  
Forjando una nueva humanidad,  
Tenemos que luchar, y juntos trabajar,  
con la poderosa mano de Dios.

### **Gracias, muchas gracias**

(Rafael Zamora, Costa Rica)

*// Gracias, muchas gracias,  
siempre gracias, mi Señor //*

Nosotros nos ofrecemos a ti  
con nuestras penas y luchas,  
con nuestro canto y nuestro reír,  
todo está en la mano tuya.  
Esta asamblea que quiere vivir

cuando tu palabra escucha,  
y estos hermanos que quieren construir  
algo nuevo en la comunidad.

### **“Gracias a la vida”**

Violeta Parra

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto,  
Me dio dos luceros, que cuando los abro  
Perfecto distingo lo negro del blanco,  
Y en el alto cielo su fondo estrellado,  
Y en las multitudes al hombre que yo amo.  
Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto,  
Me ha dado el oído que en todo su ancho,  
Graba noche y día grillos y canarios;  
Martillos, turbinas, ladridos, chubascos,  
Y la voz tan tierna de mi bien amado.  
Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto,  
Me ha dado el sonido y el abecedario,  
Con él las palabras que pienso y declaro:  
Madre, amigo, hermano, y luz alumbrando,  
La ruta del alma del que estoy amando.  
Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto,  
Me ha dado la marcha de mis pies cansados,  
Con ellos anduve ciudades y charcos,  
Playas y desiertos, montañas y llanos,  
Y la casa tuya, tu calle y tu patio.  
Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto,  
Me dio el corazón que agita su marco,  
Cuando miro el fruto del cerebro humano;  
Cuando miro el bueno tan lejos del malo;  
Cuando miro el fondo de tus ojos claros.  
Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto,  
Me ha dado la risa y me ha dado el llanto,  
Así yo distingo dicha de quebranto,  
Los dos materiales que forman mi canto,  
Y el canto de ustedes, que es el mismo canto,  
Y el canto de todos, que es mi propio canto,  
Gracias a la vida;

### **Qué alegría y que gozo**

*//Que alegría y que gozo estar juntos como hermanos//*

Si estamos reunidos en su nombre, el Señor, está aquí

Es promesa de Jesús a sus discípulos:

“con vosotros estaré”

Dios amor, el Padre, el Hijo y el Espíritu,

llama a todos a su casa

De la trinidad la iglesia es el reflejo,

comunión y santidad

Pide a Dios que todos lleguen a ser uno, como Cristo nos enseñó

Así la iglesia dará al mundo testimonio, y los hombres creerán.

(Autoría Desconocida)

## Tenemos esperanza

Federico Pagura

Porque Él entró en el mundo y en la historia  
Porque Él quebró el silencio y la agonía  
Porque Él llenó la tierra de su gloria  
Porque fue luz en nuestra noche fría  
Porque Él nació en un pesebre oscuro  
Porque vivió sembrando amor y vida  
Porque quebró los corazones duros  
Y levantó las almas abatidas.

Coro

*Por eso es que hoy tenemos esperanza  
Por eso es que luchamos con porfía  
Por eso es que hoy miramos con confianza  
El porvenir (en esta tierra mía).*  
Porque atacó ambiciosos mercaderes  
Y denunció maldad e hipocresía  
Porque exaltó a los niños, las mujeres  
Y resistió a los que de orgullo ardían  
Porque Él cargó la cruz de nuestras penas  
Y saboreó la hiel de nuestros males  
Porque aceptó sufrir nuestra condena  
Y así morir por todos los mortales.  
Porque una aurora vio su gran victoria  
Sobre la muerte, el miedo y la mentira  
Ya nada puede detener su historia  
Ni de su reino eterno la venida.

## Es por tu amor

(J. Carlos Albavera, Mexico)

Es por tu amor que estamos aquí  
reunidos hoy para cantarle,  
para adorarle, en comunión.  
Tu con nosotros si puedes cantar  
con gratitud, dame tu mano,  
se bienvenido/a, alaba a Dios.  
*// Dame tu mano,  
se bienvenido/a,  
que puedas encontrar  
gozo, paz y amistad. //*

## Llamada(o) Soy De Dios

Llamado (a) soy de Dios  
Mi mano lista está  
Para construir con él  
Un mundo fraternal (bis)  
Los ángeles no son  
llamados a cambiar  
Un mundo de dolor  
Por un mundo de paz.  
Me ha tocado a mí

Te ha tocado a ti.  
Ayúdanos Señor  
Hacerlo realidad.

### **Las puertas de tu casa**

(Gerardo Oberman, Horacio Vivares, Argentina)

Las puertas de tu casa  
se abrieron para mí,  
oh Dios de cielo y tierra,  
¡qué bueno estar aquí!  
Si abrimos nuestros brazos  
podemos recibir  
a quien te necesite  
y quiera compartir.  
tu Palabra, canciones,  
silencio y oración,  
un abrazo sincero,  
la paz y tu perdón,  
el pan que alimenta,  
da fuerza y da valor,  
*//y el fuego de tu Espíritu  
que enciende el corazón.//*

### **Señor mi Dios**

Señor mi Dios, al contemplar los cielos  
El firmamento y las estrellas mil  
Al oír tu voz en los potentes truenos  
y ver brillar el sol en su cenit.  
*Mi corazón en toma la canción:  
Cuán grande es el, cuán grande es el  
Mi corazón entona la canción  
Cuán grande es el, cuán grande es el.*  
Al recorrer los montes y los valles  
Y ver bellas las flores al pasar,  
Al escuchar el canto de las aves  
Y el murmurar del claro manantial.  
Cuando recuerdo del amor divino  
Que desde el cielo el Salvador envió  
Aquel Jesús que por salvarme vino  
Y en una cruz sufrió y por mí murió.  
Cuando el señor  
me llame a su presencia  
Al dulce hogar, al cielo de esplendor,  
Le adoraré cantando la grandeza  
De su poder y su infinito amor.

### **Felicidad**

*/Felicidad es vivir en tu casa y alabarte por toda la vida/*  
Qué bueno es estar en tu casa - Aleluya.  
Padre mío y Dios mío - Aleluya  
Cuanto anhela mi alma - Aleluya.  
Y que ardiente desea - Aleluya

Habitar en tu templo - Aleluya.  
Todo me alegro en ti, Señor.  
*/Felicidad es vivir en tu casa y alabarte por toda la vida/*  
Dichoso es aquel que en ti pone - Aleluya.  
Toda su fortaleza – Aleluya.  
Que con pasión quiere - Aleluya.  
Caminar por tus sendas - Aleluya  
Yendo por los desiertos - Aleluya.  
Lluvia y fresco siempre hallarán

### **La única razón**

La única razón de mi adoración  
Eres tu mi Señor;  
Mi único motivo para vivir  
Eres tú, mi Señor.  
Mi única verdad está en ti  
Eres mi luz y mi salvación,  
Mi único amor eres tu Señor  
Y por siempre te adoraré.  
*//Tu eres todo poderoso  
eres grande y majestuoso,  
eres fuerte, invencible,  
y no hay nadie como tu.//*

### **Momento nuevo**

Creación colectiva  
Dios hoy nos llama a un momento nuevo,  
a caminar junto con su pueblo,  
es hora de transformar lo que no da más,  
y solo y aislado, ninguno es capaz.  
Ya no es posible creer que todo es fácil,  
hay muchas fuerzas que producen muerte,  
nos dan dolor, tristeza y desolación,  
es necesario afianzar nuestra unión.  
*//Por eso, ¡ven! Entra a la rueda con todos,  
también. Tú eres muy importante.// Ven.*  
Dios hoy nos llama a un momento nuevo,  
a caminar junto con su pueblo,  
es hora de transformar lo que no da más,  
y solo y aislado, ninguno es capaz.  
La fuerza que hace hoy brotar la vida,  
obra en nosotros dándonos su gracia,  
es Dios que aún nos convida a trabajar,  
su amor repartir y las fuerzas juntar.

### **Voces unidas**

(Leo Álvarez, Santiago Benavides, 2009)  
(Chile/Colombia)  
Celebremos por la vida  
la esperanza no dormida  
y sembremos tierra del amor  
Se enderecen los caminos

trabajemos juntos por la paz.  
Nuestras voces unidas  
cantaremos como un pueblo ante el Señor  
nuestras voces Unidas  
Canta América Latina,  
Canta América Latina de su amor.  
Compartamos la comida  
que la mesa está servida  
Cristo nos invita a descansar  
adoremos sin medida  
que el Espíritu de vida  
nos ha hecho el pueblo del perdón.  
Nuestras voces unidas  
cantaremos como un pueblo ante el Señor  
nuestras voces Unidas  
Canta América Latina,  
Canta América Latina  
Canta América Latina  
de su amor.

Música: <http://leovalvarez.bandcamp.com/track/voces-unidas>

### **Dios está aquí**

Dios está aquí  
tan cierto como el aire que respiro,  
tan cierto como la mañana se levanta,  
tan cierto como que le hablo y me puede oír.

### **Cuando el pobre nada tiene**

Cuando el pobre nada tiene y aún reparte,  
cuando un hombre pasa sed y agua nos da,  
cuando el débil a su hermano fortalece,  
va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.  
Va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.  
Cuando un hombre sufre y logra su consuelo,  
cuando espera y no se cansa de esperar,  
cuando amamos aunque el odio nos rodee,  
va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.  
Va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.  
Cuando crece la alegría y nos inunda,  
cuando dicen nuestro labios la verdad,  
cuando amamos el sentir de los sencillos,  
va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.  
Va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.

### **Enviado soy de Dios**

Enviado soy de Dios,  
mi mano lista está  
para construir con él  
un mundo fraternal. (Bis)  
Los ángeles no son  
enviados a cambiar  
un mundo de dolor

por un mundo de paz,  
me ha tocado a mí hacerlo realidad,  
ayúdame Señor, a hacer tu voluntad.

### **Unidos, Unidos**

Unidos, Unidos en su nombre Unidos  
Unidas, Unidas en su nombre Unidas  
Pues en este mundo Paz y Amor tendremos (2x)  
Unidos siempre Unidos, tomados de las manos,  
Iremos por el mundo cantándole a Dios,  
La Gloria de Jesús, al fin resplandecerá  
Y el mundo entero sabrá que Dios es Amor (2x)

### **Caminemos a la Luz de Dios**

**Español:** //Caminemos a la Luz de Dios,  
Caminemos a la Luz de Dios//  
Caminemos, caminemos uuuhh  
Caminemos a la Luz de Dios.

**Soajili:** //Sia hamba cuqueneicueco,  
Sia hamba cuqueneicueco//  
Sia hamba, sia hamba uuuhh  
Sia hamba cuqueneicueco.

**Ingles:** //We are marching in the Light of God,  
We are marching in the Light of God//  
We are marching, we are marching, we are marching in the light.

**Miskito:** //Dawan ignikara wapisna,  
Dawan ignikara wapisna//  
Wapisna, wapisna,  
Dawan ignikara wapisna

### **Enciende Una Luz**

Enciende una Luz y déjala Brillar,  
La Luz de Jesús, que brilla en todo lugar,  
No la puedes esconder, no la puedes callar,  
Ante tal necesidad, enciende una luz,  
En la oscuridad (x 2)  
Como pues invocaran a Aquel en el cual no han oído,  
Y como oirán en Aquel en quien no han creído,  
Y como creerán si nadie les predica, hermosos son los pies  
De los que anuncian la paz, las buenas nuevas de Jesús.  
Enciende una Luz....

### **A imagen y semejanza**

Porque él nos dio colores para soñar  
Y así pintar lo que sentimos por dentro;  
Nos invitó a danzar a su ritmo de amor  
Con la luz y las canciones del viento.  
Porque él nos dio a todos identidad  
Nos hizo únicos y diferentes  
En libertad y en amor con un don creador  
Semejantes a nuestro Dios

Estrofa

Y Dios creó, y Dios se expresó,  
Y se gozó y se deleitó;  
Al ver que todo era bueno sonrió  
y nos llamó a compartir su creación.  
Y Dios creó, y Dios se expresó,  
Y se gozó y se deleitó;  
A imagen y semejanza de Dios  
Podemos en libertad crear y amar.  
Porque él nos dio capacidad de pensar,  
De disentir y de tomar decisiones;  
Nos dio palabra, imagen, sentido y razón  
Para hablar y expresar opiniones.  
Porque él nos dio espacio para crecer  
Con mil sonrisas emociones y juegos;  
Nos invitó a compartir, a creer y crear  
Con su danza de libertad.

(Letra: María Victoria Servín / Música: Ismael Ledesma)

### **Canto de esperanza**

Cuando se va la esperanza, El nos habla y nos dice:  
//Mira a tu hermano (a) que vive y lucha buscando un mundo mejor//.  
Cuando se va la esperanza, El nos habla y nos dice:  
//El nos habla y nos acerca a tu hermano (a) y trabajen juntos buscando la paz//  
Cuando se va la esperanza, El nos habla y nos dice:  
//No se alejen de mi lado, permanezcan firmes, yo les sostendré//  
Cantemos a nuestro Dios, es el Dios de la vida  
Porque Él está con nosotros, creando esperanza y libertad.

### **Para meditar**

Carmen Soler

### **Penas encimadas, ser pobre y ser mujer**

Publicación: Defensorías Barriales. MEDH

Voy a decirlo de entrada, para el que quiera entender:

Son penas muy encimadas,  
el ser pobre y ser mujer.  
Trabaja toda la vida, apenas para comer.  
Tiene las penas del pobre y más la de ser mujer.  
La rica tiene derechos, la pobre tiene deber.  
Ya es mucho sufrir por pobre y encima por ser  
mujer. Está tan desamparada,  
es padre y madre a la vez.  
Derechos, ni el de la queja,  
por ser pobre y ser mujer.  
Se hacen muchos discursos,  
sobre su heroísmo de ayer.  
En el papel la respetan, pero solo en el papel.  
Y lo repito de nuevo, para el que quiera entender:  
Son penas muy encimadas, el ser pobre y ser mujer.

# Annex 3

## “The churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights” Plan of work 2013 CLAI-UNFPA Assessment Sheet Meeting SRR

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Right: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Please, write the number which best describes your perception about each statement, according to the following scale:

- 2 Completely agree.
- 1 Partially agree.
- 0 Completely disagree.
- N/A Not applicable.

### 1. ORGANISATION

Criteria	2	1	0	N/A
1. The activity started punctually.				
2. The physical premises were appropriate.				
3. The sequence of activities followed the programmed order.				
4. The use and distribution of the time was appropriate.				

### 2. PRESENTATION

Criteria	2	1	0	N/A
1. The goals in the activity were achieved.				
2. The topics were presented clearly.				
3. There was opportunity to participate during the discussion of the topic.				
4. The discussions were useful.				

3. CONTENTS

Criteria	2	1	0	N/A
1. The topics are important for the Church.				
2. The topics are important for my personal life.				
3. The topics are important for my family and my community.				
4. My perception on SRR has changed.				
5. I recommend that the activity is provided again.				

Which were the specific gestures proposed by your church or organisation?

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How will these be implemented?

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What recommendations would you make about the meeting?

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The production of this material is part, as well as the fruit and experience, of a collaborative project between the Latin American Council of Churches –CLAI and the United Nations Population Fund –UNFPA LACRO, institutions which have committed, through a long and solid cooperation, to carry out a Consultation regarding the issue: “The Churches and Sexual and Reproductive Rights” together with the Churches and ecumenical organisations that are members of CLAI in eleven countries in the region.

The realities and problems related to Sexual and Reproductive Rights which inspired this work alliance and the production of this material are complex and critical. Therefore, they require special treatment so as to bring about a change of attitude in the Churches and ecumenical organisations and from these, to their communities.

The cooperation between institutions in the UN system, and other state and official agencies and the Faith-based Organisations is the result of a historical process of dialogue, mutual interests and shared spaces, but it is also the reflection and acknowledgement that BFO have a leading role in the community, as well as credibility and the ability to contribute to the transformation of society through education, service and public advocacy with their prophetic voice.

This guide was created as a result of the deep-felt need to involve the churches and ecumenical organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean so that they exert an influence in a real and specific way in the face of the problems and consequences experienced daily by our peoples and communities –especially women- when it comes to issues of Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

In order to make this guide, several activities took place throughout 2012 in eleven designated countries; a Consultation process was carried out in each of these about a specific right and the “See, Judge, Act” method was applied. Relevant data was collected for the production of this material, so the guide is based on the reflections, statements and recommendation of the churches and ecclesiastical organisations which took part in the National Consultations.

We offer this tool to the churches and ecumenical organisations so as to facilitate and generate spaces of reflection, empowerment and organisation regarding sexual and reproductive rights within the ecclesiastical communities, from a theological and pastoral perspective.