

VOICES

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VOICES
OF FAITH

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VISION – ALL VOICES COUNT



Welcome to the first edition of VOICES.

Voices of Faith, an initiative of the Fidel Götz Foundation, seeks to enhance the dignity, participation and leadership of women and girls through purposeful and compelling storytelling.

Voices of Faith is founded on my 17 years of work with the Fidel Götz Foundation, particularly its relationships with people at the grassroots level. The focus on mostly invisible women evolved from witnessing their daily work and the conviction, love, passion and deep faith they brought to their lives. They inspired me to bring their ideas, their stories and their commitment, passion and joy for life to the forefront. Talented and experienced women from different fields of work, they all are committed to creating a better, more merciful and just world.

To ensure these powerful stories receive the attention they deserve as examples of faith in action, what more powerful symbolic venue could we have than the Vatican? Women's voices are now heard from the heart of the Church. The voices and examples were chosen because they are close to the heart of Pope Francis.

It was and still is a novelty in the Vatican, that International Women's Day is celebrated and women 'raise their voice' on Vatican terrain. Pope Francis agrees that women's voices need to be heard more. We are grateful to the Vatican – especially His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State – for the great openness they have shown to Voices of Faith by welcoming us.

Voices of Faith has gained great momentum over the last two years and continues to be a forum from the heart of the Church, drawing positive attention from around the globe. I am grateful to the many wonderful and committed women who have dedicated their time to come and share their stories with us.

Through VOICES we highlight some of the compelling stories we heard in the last two years. I hope and trust that these stories will touch your heart. These stories will make you alternately hopeful, outraged, heartbroken and ennobled, but every one of these stories will humble you by the example of mercy, leadership and faith in action on the part of women.

Enjoy reading about these remarkable women. Share the passion, move to action and join Voices of Faith. Because all voices count.

Warmest regards,

Chantal M. Götz

ABOUT CHANTAL M. GÖTZ

Chantal M. Götz is the current Managing Director of the Voices of Faith initiative, an undertaking that seeks to enhance the dignity, participation and leadership of women and girls through persistent and good storytelling.

A lawyer by training with a master's degree in business entrepreneurship, Chantal has 17 years of experience leading the Fidel Götz Foundation, a Liechtenstein-based foundation that supports Catholic activities. Chantal's early experiences have taught her that service must encompass not only the provision of funding for global projects but also the commitment to fieldwork to ensure that her projects will help those in need. Her approach in this manner is unique among charitable foundations. Her projects with the poor and marginalized have been geographically broad and include work in India, South

Africa, Sierra Leone, Malawi, Afghanistan, Mexico, Brazil, the Ukraine; they have addressed a myriad of issues: refugees, education, maltreatment of women and girls, poverty, entrepreneurship and the development of business skills. She has worked closely with Caritas Internationalis, the Jesuits and Jesuit Refugee Service, Don Bosco and donor organizations such as Adveniat, Missio, Church in Need and various Vatican institutions.

Equally important has been her long-term collaboration with a group of like-minded women running their family's Catholic Foundation to support each other in their faith and work. Chantal initiated a program with this group in 2007 to create a dialog with the Vatican about women. The group has since expanded to include a broader representation of those who serve the Church.

ANGER AND REVERENCE

by **Kerry A. Robinson**

All of our lives we are invited into a deeper relationship with Jesus and to live better lives as Christians. We are called to hear his words and observe his actions in order to emulate him in our own lives.

And what do we know about Jesus? He is the radical peacemaker. He tells us to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek, to lay down our lives for others.

So in today's Gospel, it is shocking to see Jesus angry. Anger is such a deeply human emotion and yet because it is Jesus, we know that there is also a divine anger at hand here. It gives us permission to be angry.

Why is Jesus angry in this Gospel passage? He is angry because what is holy, what is a sacred place, is not being revered. He is angry because the people who are present lack all reverence for what is holy in their midst.

When we think of our lives today – March 8, 2015, International Women's Day – when are we angry? Where is there a lack of reverence for what God deems as holy? Where do we lack reverence? And what could be more holy in God's eyes than all of creation, the earth, humankind?



Kerry A. Robinson

ABOUT KERRY A. ROBINSON

Kerry A. Robinson, a member of the advisory board of Voices of Faith, is executive director of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, U.S.A. She is a member of the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities, and she has been an advisor to grant-making foundations, charitable non-profits and family philanthropies since 1990.

Kerry is a frequent writer and speaker on the subjects of spirituality, philanthropy, development and service. She is the author of Imagining Abundance: Fund-

raising, Philanthropy and a Spiritual Call to Service (2014).

On 8 March, 2015, International Women's Day, at the opening Mass for the Voices of Faith celebration of women's contributions to the Church and the world, the archbishop celebrant invited Kerry to reflect on the readings for the Third Sunday in Lent in the beautiful Chiesa di Santa Maria Regina della Famiglia, in the heart of the Vatican. The Gospel passage is John 2:13-25, the Cleansing of the Temple.

We are called in this Gospel today and every day to never be apathetic, to always be angry when the holy is compromised. We are called to be angry when the dignity of people is compromised. We are called to be angry when there is sexism in the world or in the Church. We are called to be angry when our sisters and brothers live in extreme poverty, the result of unjust structures that we can remedy. It should make us furious that women and children – the most vulnerable – are disproportionately affected by poverty, war, violence, disease. We should be angry when whole generations are being raised in refugee camps. We should be angry when children do not have access to education, or food, or water, or healthcare. We should be angry when sexual abuse and violence are still so prevalent in every part of the world, and that rape is a weapon of war. We should be angry when young girls are kidnapped and sold into slavery. We should be angry that in 2015 human trafficking is a very real, collective sin.

Our invitation today is to claim that anger, and in emulating Christ, to turn that anger into opportunities for action to reverence what God holds dear, what God sees as holy and sacred. And that is surely the very lives of people. Today in a preferential way let us uphold and promote the dignity and full participation of all women and girls in the world and in the Church.

Come to the table of the Eucharist and pray for the grace to never be apathetic when what is sacred is being desecrated. Pray for the grace to always have the strength and sustenance to reverence what God sees as holy and, as Christ did, to act on that with the whole of your life.



Lesley-Anne Knight, photographed by Alessandra Zucconi

VOICES THAT COUNT

by Lesley-Anne Knight

I am very honoured to have been asked to open this wonderful and inspiring event. Today we are going to hear some amazing stories from amazing women on the frontline.

But there is one particular amazing woman who will not be saying much herself, but without whom none of this would have been possible. I am talking of course about our host, Chantal Götz, the inspiration and driving force behind Voices of Faith. In addition to having the vision and dogged determination to make this event a reality, as Executive Director of her family's charitable foundation she works tirelessly to strengthen the Church and its work to help poor and marginalised people – in particular, women and girls – around the world. So before we go any further, let us please express our appreciation to Chantal for her vision, her dedication and all the hard work she does. Like you, I am keen to hear from the extraordinary speakers who are lined up to talk to us today, so I will confine myself to a few brief thoughts.

Let me say first of all that it is a great pleasure to be back in Rome. As some of you know, I spent

four years working here as Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis. There is a popular saying that goes something like 'You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy'. Reflecting on my time in Rome, I have come to the conclusion that 'You can take the woman out of Caritas, but you can't take Caritas out of the woman'. The experience of working in Caritas Internationalis was unforgettable. But 'Caritas' is not just an organisation; 'caritas' it is a way of life, a way of being. It is love; it is compassion, it is mercy and charity. Above all, it is an expression of what Lumen gentium says so beautifully: The Church as a sign and a sacrament of God's love for all humanity.

During my time in Rome, and previously with CAFOD, the Catholic development organisation of England and Wales, I was privileged to travel to many parts of the world and witness our Church communities putting that love and

Where will women be tomorrow?

that expression – the sign and sacrament of God’s love for all humanity – into practice. In the aftermath of natural disasters like the Asian tsunami, hurricanes and flooding in Samoa, Tonga, the Philippines, India and Honduras; the devastating earthquake in Haiti; in refugee camps in Central America and in Darfur; and in the world’s poorest countries, where people face the daily reality of chronic poverty. In all of these places I met extraordinary people doing extraordinary work, in the name of the Catholic Church, in the name of ‘love’. Very many of these extraordinary people were women. For those of us who work in peace and reconciliation, high-level diplomacy, humanitarian aid and development, it is no surprise that the brightest and most dedicated women in the Catholic Church can often be found in these places. There is a question that I ask myself even now, whether I am in the Central African Re-

public or Myanmar: Where are the women? It is not always for the obvious reason that they have been excluded and it is a question that can reveal some interesting truths. The question often highlights the absence of women in leadership roles in business and industry, government, major international institutions, at global summits, in peace negotiations, and of course in the structures of the major world religions. At other times, however, the question can reveal the uncomfortable truth of exactly where women are present: they are right there on the frontline, suffering the worst effects of war, violence, grinding poverty and disease.

In the midst of war, women and girls are the first victims of rape, violence and abduction. We are still asking ourselves, ‘Where are our girls in Northern Nigeria?’ In the midst of poverty, girls

ABOUT LESLEY-ANNE KNIGHT

Lesley-Anne Knight is Chief Executive Officer of The Elders, an independent group of global leaders working together for peace and human rights. Nelson Mandela founded the group in 2007. Ms. Knight previously served as Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, a global confederation of Catholic aid agencies based in Rome. In this role, she coordinated global relief efforts following major natural disasters and humanitarian crises like the Haiti earthquake of 2010 and the

conflicts in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Middle East and Sri Lanka.

She has also worked as International Director of the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and as the Emergencies Manager for Help-Age International. Earlier in her career she gained valuable field experience, having spent several years in Latin America working with indigenous peoples and refugees with Oxfam.

will often be the first to be taken out of school to be sold as child brides, and they will always be the last to eat. In the midst of disease, women care for the sick and have the greatest risk of infection. Those most affected by the Ebola crisis in West Africa are women.

There are many similar examples that highlight the need to take into account the particular circumstances of women and girls in humanitarian crises, peace building and situations of chronic poverty.

If we know that women often bear the brunt of these problems, and that women are out there in the field, working to end that suffering, surely their voices need to be heard. Surely women need to be more fully involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Maybe if we

made better use of the skills, expertise, compassion and the family and community-building of women, the world would be a more peaceful, just place. Today some of these women’s voices – these Voices of Faith – will be heard. Today I am not asking you, ‘Where are the women?’ They are right here. Rather the question I leave you as we ponder and reflect and go forward: Where will women be tomorrow?

A CRY AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

by Azezet Kidane

In my four years in Israel and Palestine, I have heard hundreds of horrific testimonies. I come to you today not to talk 'about them', but to talk 'for' them, to let their cry be heard.

Three or four months ago I received a telephone call from a desperate Eritrean woman in the United States. Her name was Rahel. Her brother was held in Sinai, Egypt. She was forced to listen to his torture and his screams for mercy, and she was asked to pay US\$6,000 ransom to have him released from their hands. Rahel was desperate. She did not know what to do. She was a new refugee in the United States, and her family is very poor. It took her a long time to raise \$6,000 in order to free her brother. She begged on the streets and in churches and among relatives. Even her family sold their belongings, animals, houses – whatever they had – in order to save their child. She called me because she wanted me to pass this money to an Israeli, so he could pass it to the human traffickers in Sinai. Her call put me in a very difficult position. I didn't know what to

do. I prayed to God to give me strength because I did not have the answer. On the one hand, if I do this, maybe the life of this 17-year-old boy might be saved. On the other hand, how can I cooperate with these human traffickers, this madness, this chain of slavery, to give them this money from people who did not have the money but got it to save their child? It was a heart-breaking situation for me.

I didn't know what to say, but I had to tell her, 'I can't do it. I can't cooperate with these people. Either you'll have to send it directly or find your way'. After a few days, she called me back. Her 17-year-old brother was killed. For several days I could not sleep. I was wondering what the good shepherd would have done. I don't know if I have to feel guilt. I don't know. I don't have an answer.



Azezet Kidane, photographed by Luca Catalano Gonzaga

While I am speaking, people are still in the torture camps, dying, suffering and crying, and nobody hears their cry because they are underground.

In Israel there are 53,000 asylum seekers. Most of them are from Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia. These people made their journey to Israel through Sinai. Most of them pass through from one trafficker to another, and they end up in these torture camps. Their families have to raise thousands of money to save their children.

In my volunteer work with Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, I interviewed more than 1,500 survivors of human trafficking. I met people burned with melted plastics. I met people burned with kerosene. I met people with deep wounds. I met people were blindfolded for six to eight months and then taken out into the sun, which made them lose their sight. The worst is when their mind and soul are wounded. Only God can heal them. Only God can give them strength to see the future and to embrace the

human person. I pray that these people may trust human persons and look at their future as bright. I have to listen and listen and listen. One day, I met a lady who escaped from Eritrea with her best friend, her childhood friend. As soon as they arrived in Sudan, they were kidnapped and brought to Sinai in an inhuman way, without water and with very little bread. If they received water, it was stained with gasoline so they did not ask for more. As soon as they arrived in the torture camps in Sinai, they were tortured, electrocuted, hung, suspended from the ceiling and sexually abused, in a human way and an inhuman way. They were chained for six months. The friend of this lady could not survive. She died. So you know what they did? They left her best friend chained with her for three days while she was dead. She was screaming, 'Kill me also. I cannot live without her. Kill me'. They burned her

hair. Luckily, or maybe through God's grace, she survived. When her parents paid \$30,000, she was carried to the border of Israel. She was a shadow of herself. When she looked in the mirror for the first time in Bathsheba Hospital, she did not recognize herself. She told me, 'I was pinching myself to know if I am dead or I am alive'.

I am an African. I was born in Africa. I worked in Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. I have seen war, famine, hunger and other difficulties. But in Israel the horror I have heard from the torture camp survivors, you do not see it even in terror films. But these boys and women are courageous. They tell their story thousands of times. They dig their wounds hundreds of times to the journalists or to whoever promises they will stop what is happening.

We will tell the world, but the world until now is silent. The world does not care because they are poor Africans. While I am speaking, people are still in the torture camps, dying, suffering and crying, and nobody hears their cry because they are underground. Even those above ground do not have the chance to come and tell their story. That is why I came to speak about them. They do not have the chance.

Even after such experiences, like torture and shock, in Israel they do not have any rights. They are called infiltrators. They do not have any status. They go from prison to prison. They have done weeks and weeks of hunger strikes and demonstrations. Nobody listens. Instead, they are put in prison. But they are strong. They fight for their rights. I do not want to enter the conversation about why these people run from their own

countries. You know more than I do. But I want to pray for them so that their trust in God and in the human person is strong.

When I walk the streets of Tel Aviv or volunteer with the African Refugee Development Center, I meet women with a child held to their chest, and they tell me, 'Sister Aziza, you know this child? You remember? I didn't want him. I couldn't go ahead with the pregnancy because it was too painful for me to carry on the child whose father I didn't even know. I didn't even see the man who was abusing me because I was blindfolded. But now, the child is my reason to live. My child makes me reconcile with my past and gives me strength to see a bright future'. As a woman and a missionary, after God these women are my strength. That is why I am telling you about their courage and their faith.

One day, I went to a hospital to see a lady who was dying. It was difficult to hear her. I was singing in our language, Tigrinya, and at a certain point I see her hand pointing up to God. She said, 'Sinai, Sinai, I came'. Then she mumbled, 'So much is untold'.

Yes, she is right. We will never know what happened to these brothers and sisters of ours in Sinai. As a Comboni sister, my founder fought against slavery. I also want to end slavery. He showed the world that slavery has to end. I want to end this new slavery, with the grace of God and with prayer from all of us. Please do not remain in silence.

ABOUT AZEZET KIDANE

Azezet Kidane, a member of the Comboni Missionary Sisters of Eritrea, has volunteered as a nurse for Physicians for Human Rights-Israel and the African Refugee Development Center in Tel Aviv, Israel, and she has interviewed more than 1,500 African asylum seekers.

Her ground-breaking research project has helped bring international attention to human trafficking in the region. Sister Aziza, as she is known, has accompanied victims of kidnapping, forced labour, sexual slavery, rape, and other

forms of torture. She has seen burns and whip marks on the bodies of those who fled to Israel through the Sinai. Her fluency in Amharic, Tigrinya, Arabic and Sudanese is of great assistance to her work.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of State recognized her as a global leader in the fight against human trafficking, and she received an honour from then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for her 'perseverance, heartfelt concern, and willingness to listen' to victims of human trafficking.



Azezet Kidane, photographed by Luca Catalano Gonzaga

HEALTHCARE IS THE FOUNDATION

by Mukti Bosco

It is an honour to be here in the heart of the Vatican, representing Half the Sky from India. It is a dream-come-true.

I want to thank the organisers of Voices of Faith, Chantal Götz in particular for the invitation to share my personal journey. Her zest for life, unlimited energy and single-minded doggedness is an inspiration. Most of us women have some of that spirit in us and that is why we are here today. What a blessing to celebrate this day with all of you in this holy place. I have been asked to talk about my personal journey.

I was born into a mixed religion family. My father, Dr. Mahesh Kaushik, an ophthalmic surgeon from Haryana in northern India, hailed from the highest caste possible, a very orthodox Hindu Brahmin family that did not allow women to go to college or work. He fell in love with my mother, Dorothy Paul, an Anglican (now a very devout Catholic) and a public health nurse working in a hospital in Tamilnadu in southern India. On my father's side of the family, I am the first woman to graduate from college. I grew up in a home where the norm was daily puja (prayer), celebrating Diwali and other major Hindu festivals and going

on pilgrimages to Hindu temples. At the same time, I studied in Catholic schools, accompanied my mom to church every week and celebrated Christmas and Easter. Later I married a wonderful man, Bosco, from a devout Catholic family. My experience has given me a deep respect and acceptance of all religions, taking the best of every aspect of life, while also being able to choose my own faith, not because I was born into it, but making a commitment to Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour and my best friend. I attended Christian Medical College in Vellore, Tamilnadu, which laid the foundation for my faith and work. The motto of the college, 'Not to be served but to serve' (Matthew 20:28), is ingrained not only in my psyche but in every cell of my being. It is the bugle call and guiding principle for my work.

Twenty years after my graduation, my husband pushed me to do my masters in healthcare management. As part of my program, I had to go into the slums and villages and talk to groups of women to basically understand their healthcare



Mukti Bosco, photographed by Alessandra Zucconi

needs. At some level, I knew I wanted to work in healthcare, but it is a very complex subject, so we needed to understand it. I asked a self-help group of Muslim women in Hyderabad, the city I come from, what they do during a healthcare emergency. One woman spoke up and said, 'Madam, we mortgage or pawn our productive asset'. Immediately I assumed the productive asset was a sewing machine because most of the women were sewing, or a pushcart in which the husbands sold vegetables or fruits on the streets. She said, 'No, madam. My son who is six years old, I pulled him out of school, and he's working for 12 hours a day at a tea shop because I had to take a loan of 6,000 rupees', or about US\$100, 'to pay [for treatment] for an illness, typhoid, of his father'. The story killed me because I had my son Nishant who was just five, and my daughter Gitanjali who was just two. I thought: 'What am I doing living under the same sky, in the same city, where a six-year-old child has to work for 12 hours a day to pay off a loan to treat an illness that could have easily been prevented? It is not right'. That sealed it for me. I said I needed to do something. It is time. I felt it was my calling and the bugle call for my life. Thus my friend Nimish Parekh and I started Healing Fields Foundation. Our vision is to make quality healthcare accessible and affordable to all people, especially the poor and marginalized people in India.

The problem is enormous. In this particular area of India, two thirds of people live on less than \$2 a day. According to the World Bank, 25 percent of Indians fall below the poverty line. Just one incident of hospitalization means lifelong indebtedness. Seventy percent of illnesses are preventable. Eighty percent of healthcare expenditures are out of pocket. Sixty percent of child debts are due to preventable health issues. Forty seven percent of our children under five are underweight and malnourished. Six hundred million Indians defecate in the open. Eighty percent of Indian women do not have access to sanitary

napkins. The easiest path would be to say it is too overwhelming, tuck my tail, runaway and hide somewhere. But we decided we needed to find a solution, and we set three rules to start our work in the foundation.

The first rule is to listen to and understand the women we are serving. We emptied our minds and hearts and went into the urban slums and rural and tribal areas and listened to the health needs and priorities of the women. Our priorities as educated women are very different than the priorities of the poor. We learned many things: As anywhere in the world, women are the custodians and caretakers of the family's health. The mother cooks the food, runs to the hospital with her children, and makes sure the kids are immunized. Women do not want any kind of health financing or insurance only for themselves. They want it for the whole family. Most of the women do not have basic information we take for granted on health, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation and the different kinds of programs available for all of us. It is easy for us to use Google. For example, when we receive a prescription drug, we can immediately use Google to find out the problems, side effects and whether we should take it or not. Our women do not have that luxury. Finally, we learned that even the poorest of the poor women are willing to pay for healthcare, however small the amount. She does not want it for free. She does not want charity. She is willing to pay, provided it is quality healthcare and, most importantly, that she is treated with dignity and respect.

The second rule is to make the women we serve our partners in problem solving. We partner with local self-help groups and microfinance organizations and select and train women members to become community health facilitators. They learn to do health education in the communities, create access to information on nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, provide First Aid, build toilets and so on. They also learn to identify health problems

ABOUT MUKTI BOSCO & HEALING FIELDS

Mukti Bosco, a Catholic laywoman and social entrepreneur from India, is co-founder and secretary general of Healing Fields Foundation, which makes quality healthcare more affordable and accessible in India, especially for the poor and marginalized.

For the past 17 years she has worked in the poor, rural areas of India. She has served on the subcommittee for micro health insurance of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of In-

dia, she was a member of the first international working group on developing financial and social indicators for micro insurance, and she participated in four annual meetings of the Clinton Global Initiative.

She received the prestigious Ashoka Fellowship in 2007 as well as the Women Social Entrepreneur Award from Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani in 2009.

within the village and find a solution through the resources available in their own communities. They become a walking, talking 'health Wiki' to help their community find solutions. It works. We have trained about 2,000 community health facilitators in about 2,000 villages, and we will double that number by 2017. In Bihar, one of the poorest states in India, we thought building toilets was a priority, but the public health engineering department came to us and told us they had built toilets and nobody was using them. We went there to find out why. This particular place is on the banks of the sacred river, the Ganges. Every monsoon it gets flooded. When it floods, poor people lose their house and belongings. So what did they do? Self-help groups took microloans to buy cattle and feed. The cattle, which provided them income, needed a dry place. The toilet had a nice cement floor and a roof, so they converted the toilets to store their cattle feed. Their priority was not a toilet, but rather a safe and dry space for the cattle feed. So we worked with the community health facilitators and microfinance groups and started talking to the village about creating other dry spaces during the monsoon so they can use the toilet for the purpose it has been built.

We learned it from the women, our partners. Now they can use the toilets during the monsoon.

The third rule relates to partnerships and collaboration. We believe we should not reinvent the wheel. If we find an innovative idea or solution, we should use it and thereby conserve the scarce resources of non-profits. We believe we can serve the communities better by sharing ideas and best practices. We always partner with local organizations already working in the community, the government functionaries and most importantly the local women to find solutions for their problems. We need to ensure that the women we have trained can sustain themselves within the community and create livelihoods. This creates an ecosystem of good health in the village and creates previously unavailable access to products and services through the distribution platform of 2,000 community health facilitators. As I said earlier, 80 percent of these women do not have access to sanitary napkins. Most women in a poor family share a cotton cloth. It is not hygienic. Our women started doing classes on menstrual hygiene with adolescent girls and young women. Then they said they needed to create affordable access to sanitary



Healing Fields women in Bihar, India, photographed by Chantal Götz

napkins. Now the women run a manufacturing unit that sustains them in their environment. The ecosystem supports them. We have also partnered with a non-profit eye hospital that teaches our women how to do vision testing. This hospital does vision screening in the villages and schools and in the villages and refers people to the eye hospital for treatment. Now they can get access to care which was not available earlier.

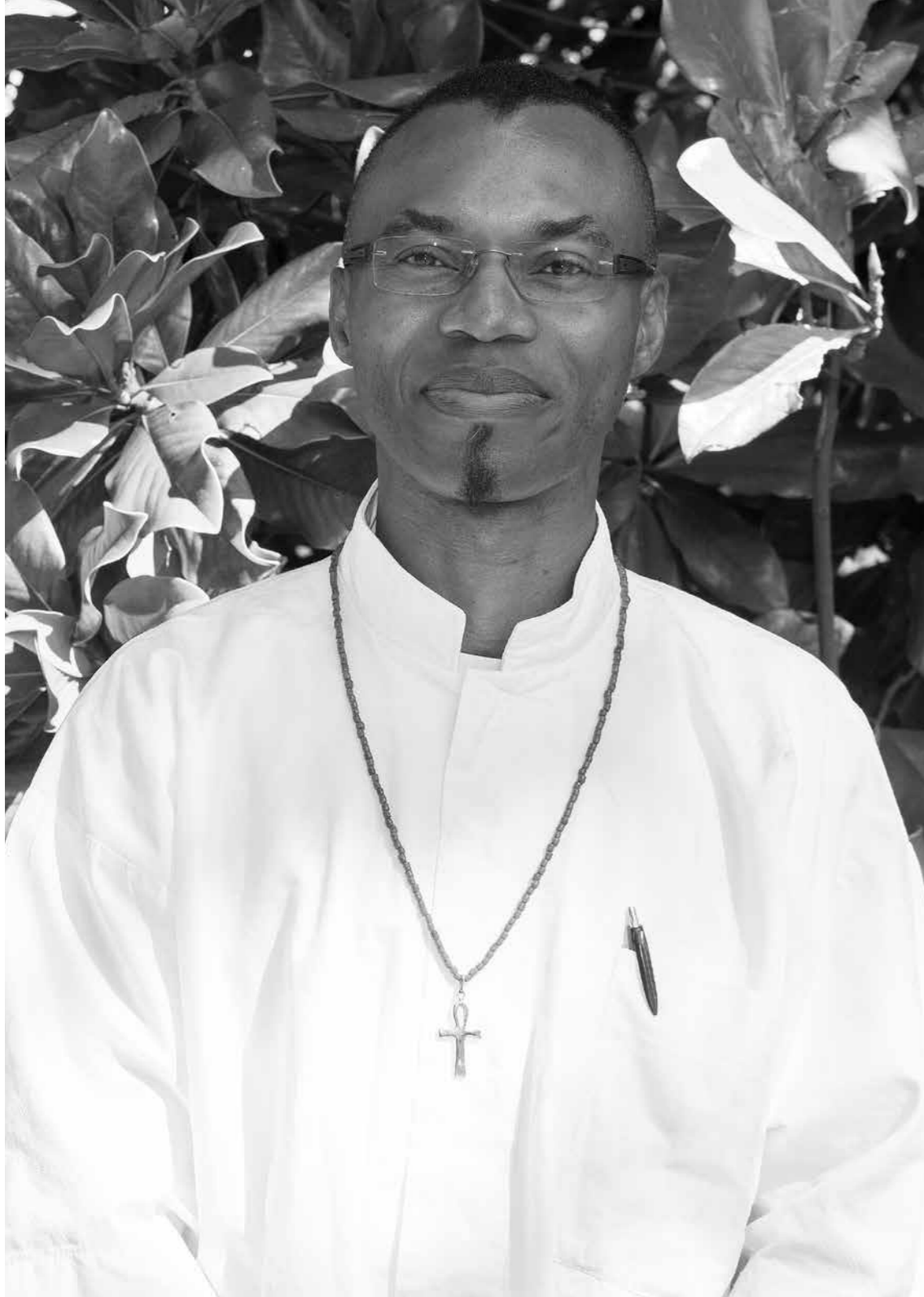
We must educate the women, based on their reality, to become the keepers of health in their families and in their communities. Collaborations, partnerships and linkages among the multitude of health players will make this possible. The crux is making the community take responsibility for their own health and to move from illness and wellness.

I hope my story has inspired you. Everywhere people and problems are similar to a large extent, and we need to find solutions that fit the reality of the people we serve. The past couple weeks I have

been reading from the Gospels about the healing ministry of Jesus. He went to the sick and healed them in their homes, in their villages, on the streets, in the square. At times he called out their names, touched them, used mud and spit to open eyes and instructed people to go home and not talk about it. Jesus did not discriminate or exclude anyone. He was inclusive and embraced all who came to him. And he asked his disciples to go out and heal in his name. We are his disciples, and this is a ministry I believe he has commanded us to do, to be his miracle workers and to spread his healing in our work – and not necessarily just healthcare. I have heard awesome stories from these women who have been going out and doing the healing.

We have learned in the Healing Fields Foundation that the seemingly impossible is possible through commitment and prayer, and that we women make it possible. If all of us women in this room and elsewhere can join hands together and be able to partner and collaborate in this work, imagine what a transformed world we will leave behind.

We women make it possible.



Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, photographed by Alessandra Zucconi

UNHOLY ALLIANCE AGAINST EDUCATED AFRICAN WOMAN

by Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator

I confess to an inevitable self-consciousness related to the obvious fact that I have the privilege of being the only man to share this podium with such a diverse, global group of accomplished and distinguished women.

I would like to express my profound deference and respect for the causes and commitments that each one of my fellow speakers represents and promotes. Having established that my gender does not qualify as a *raison d'être* (to be) on this podium, I am also aware that the invitation to this event came by way of what perhaps should have passed as an inconsequential initiative.

As you may recall, the dreaded and infamous terrorist group, Boko Haram, abducted and kidnapped 276 schoolgirls in April 2014. The event triggered a global manifestation of outrage and solidarity: Outrage against a brazen act of religious banditry and jihadist zealotry; solidarity for the innocent teenage abductees and their families. The concomitant online campaign, #BringBackOurGirls, attracted high-profile global support. Callous and depraved as the act seemed at the time – and still does 388 days later – I felt strong indignation and frustration because of the nonchalance

and indifference that characterized the response of the Nigerian government. I hasten to add that to call the approach of the government a 'response' amounts to unduly dignifying a complete failure of governance and leadership at a time when both were most needed. Denial, cover-up, distraction, blaming and deception characterized the attitude of the government toward what in a more civilized society would have counted as a massive national tragedy. So, I wrote an open letter to President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria, demanding his immediate resignation on account of gross dereliction of his constitutional duty to protect the Chibok Girls.

Initially, I contended that the reaction of the president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the federal republic of Nigeria would have been significantly different, that is, urgent, resolute and relentless, had one of the abductees been the president's daughter. Which parent would go to

sleep, and occupy him or herself with petty political chores, while their daughter languished in the forest stronghold of a murderous gang driven by a nihilistic sectarian ideology? Yet, on deeper reflection, the sad reality was not that the Chibok girls were not daughters of wealthy and powerful pol-

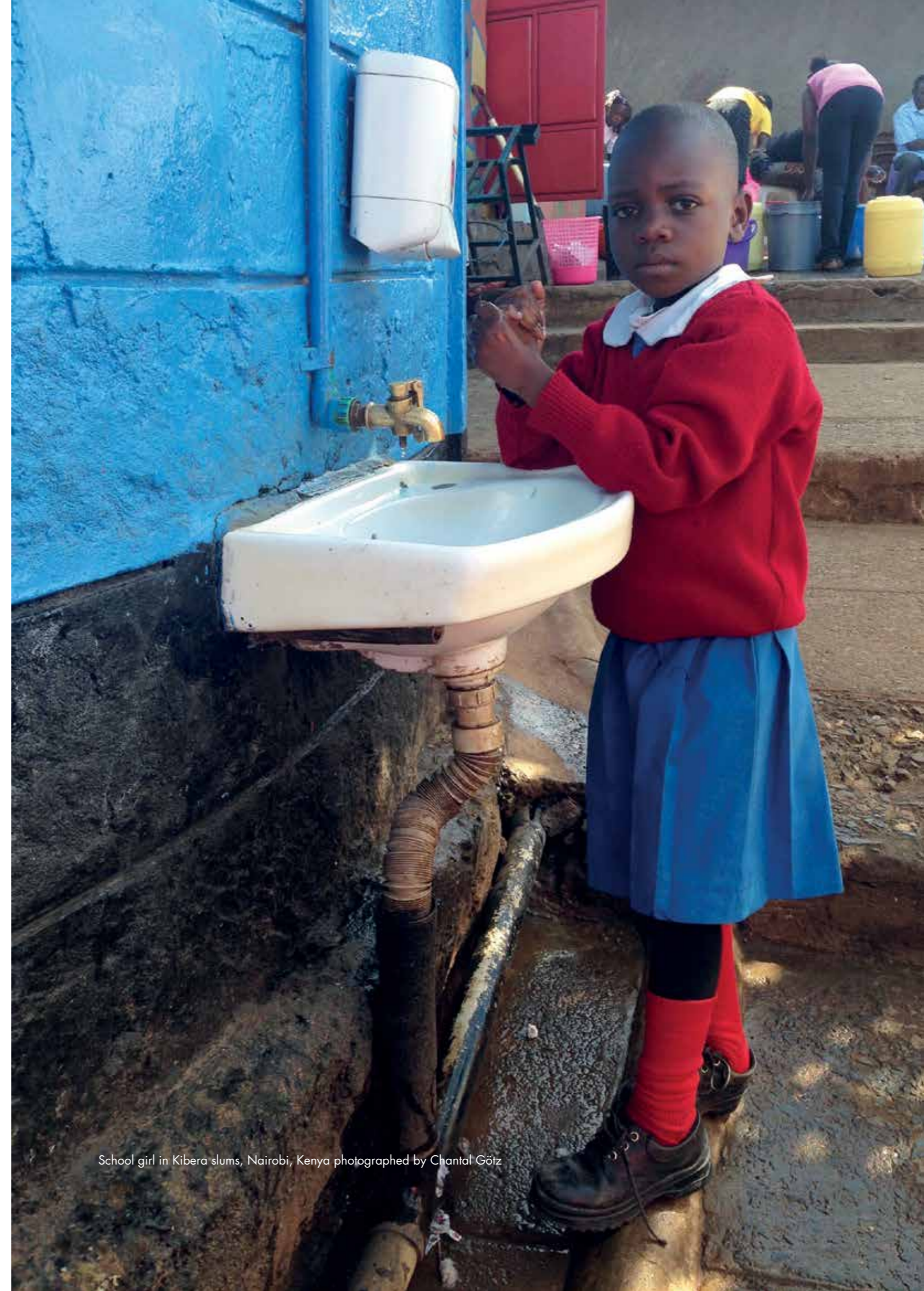
ing factors that militate against the education of the girl-child that we may not simply overlook or ignore. Many are the societies in sub-Saharan Africa that peg the value of a girl-child on the economic return projected on her physiognomy, including the tone or complexion of her skin, and

I must precede my choices and actions with the question: Does it serve humanity, women and men, fairly, justly and compassionately?

iticians; it was simply that they were girls – people whom society and culture actively conspire to downgrade their social premium and human dignity to that of second class citizens, children – as it were – of a lesser god. You see, unless and until we confront the misguided belief that the girl-child simply does not count in the order of gender priority, the impunity of groups like Boko Haram, the Taliban, Al Qaeda and Shabab and their trademark fanaticism will continue a while longer. Thus I have reached the conclusion that the abduction of the Chibok Girls is a consequence of a prior violation of the fundamental human rights of the girl-child, and chief among the perpetrators is the political establishment called the state. Statistics on this matter do not lie. According to the United Nations, sub-Saharan Africa records the lowest enrolment ratios of girls and the lowest rate of completion for girls in primary and secondary education compared to boys. There are underly-

her stature. Even when educated, as in some parts of Nigeria, her ‘market’ value is calculated in function of the level of education; ironically, in some instances, education is a vital determinant of the size of bridal wealth demanded during marriage negotiation and transaction. Worse still, there are cultures (like mine) where the education of a girl-child is considered a misplaced priority at best or a wasted investment at worst. Several of my uneducated older sisters prove this disturbing fact.

The frustration of women’s dream for education emerges from the same combination of cultural prejudice, social indifference, economic miscalculations, political ineptitude, religious fanaticism and sectarian hatred. Put together they militate against the chances – however little – of a girl-child in quest of education for integral human development and social transformation. We are familiar with the slogan that the development of a



School girl in Kibera slums, Nairobi, Kenya photographed by Chantal Götz

nation is premised on the imperative of educating the girl-child: Educate a girl and educate a nation! Repeated with regularity, this slogan hardly translates into reality, because the equation is heavily rigged in her disfavour.

Whether it is the case of the teenage education campaigner and Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai from north-western Pakistan; or the moving story of a resolute Somali woman, Suad Sharif Mohamed, in Kakuma refugee camp, present at this event; or the unfinished and disturbing saga of the Chibok Girls; the forces arrayed against the education of the girl-child are legion and formidable. To quote the British prime minister, David Cameron, in the aftermath of the horrific massacre at a school in Peshawar by Pakistani Taliban in December 2014: 'It is horrifying that children are simply killed for going to school'. The horror of such attacks carries a significant gender quotient, for the odds, risk and toll rise significantly when those school children are girls. Although the perpetrators of terror facily and routinely anchor their brutal assault of the educated girl or woman on religion, I remain convinced that the gods are not to blame.

And this is my second conclusion: The drivers of destructive gender-based violence run deep in collective socio-cultural psyche. Truth be told, any society that relegates women to a secondary status and allots them menial tasks creates propitious conditions for gender-based violence and morally depraved ideology to emerge and thrive. In the final analysis, I find profoundly disturbing not only the fact that educated women are perceived as a threat to such ideologies, but also the sad realization that such ideologies render the educated, independent and competent African woman an endangered species. It would take an equally compelling counter-narrative to prise open the stranglehold of sectarian ideologies, banditry and zealotry that weighs heavily on the fate of women, especially in developing countries.

Promoting this counter-narrative and creating conditions for it to be heard is key to a change in mentality. Are there women reading the sacred texts of world religions? How do they interpret these texts? Does their interpretation challenge the centuries-old and regnant patriarchal, misogynistic hermeneutics to which societies and cultures have become almost accustomed? Are there women who model in creative and innovative ways the possibilities and potential of an indestructible and creative feminist outlook on life, unfettered and unbowed by expectations of a dominant male class? Looking at the line-up of speakers for this event, I am reminded to respond unequivocally in the affirmative.

Besides being on a permanent lookout for voices of faith, hope and charity who champion the cause of equality of the human race and combat gender discrimination in all spheres of life, each person, woman or man, ought to make a personal commitment to calibrate the rights to education and other social goods in function of a holistic perception of humanity. Whether I teach or I lead, I must precede my choices and actions with the question: Does it serve humanity, women and men, fairly, justly and compassionately?

To digress a bit, I take measured pride in my work as chair of an initiative to offer scholarships to African women to study theology, ethics and religion at postgraduate level. The programme is on course to graduate eight African women with doctoral degrees in 2016. It is a modest initiative, one perhaps that seems only a drop in the vast ocean of need; yet, one that makes a difference to at least eight highly educated, competent and independent African women who will never settle for the lie – secular or religious – embedded in the sociology of inferiority and subservience in the name of God.

Finally, back to our Chibok Girls, let me make clear that I do not claim to be a voice for them. I

ABOUT AGBONKHIANMEGHE E. OROBATOR

Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, a Jesuit priest from Nigeria, is president/principal and a professor of systematic theology at Hekima University College and the Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations, Nairobi, Kenya, and he is presently serving as a chair in the department of theology at Marquette University, Milwaukee, U.S.A. He served as provincial superior of the Eastern Africa Province of the Society of Jesus (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Sudan) from 2009 to 2014.

Among other books, he is the author of Theology Brewed in an African Pot (Orbis, 2008), editor of Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod (Orbis, 2011), and co-editor (with Linda Hogan) of Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church (Orbis, 2014).

A delegate to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, he is considered one of the most brilliant of a new generation of Jesuit leaders worldwide.

can only imagine their pain and – who knows – regret at the fatal cost of dreaming to be educated Nigerian women, as daily they bemoan their fate and the loss of that dream. Daily they cry, daily they lament, held captive by people who fear and would mortally combat well-educated African women.

If we listen carefully, there are millions of Chibok Girls in our world shut out of the halls of learning by a conspiracy of cultural complacency, gender discrimination and political short-sightedness.

There are millions of Chibok Girls whose dream for education have been truncated by atavistic mentalities that consider women tradable and disposable commodities or as useful currency to preserve the cause of a socially engineered machinery of gender superiority. There are millions of Chibok Girls whose fate challenges our claims to unrivalled globalization and technological progress in the 21st century. There are millions of Chibok Girls whose singular gifts would be forever lost to

humanity because of terrorists who turn schools into abattoirs of civilization – any civilization.

These are the girls we need to bring back. We may not remain deaf to their voices.

As a race, notwithstanding the unparalleled technological advancements of our times, we still remain largely uneducated in the art of honouring the dignity of women, reverencing their unbowed spirit and upholding their inalienable rights to common social goods. Unless and until we excel in this kind of education, our world will remain half-finished, incomplete and violated.

We have to bring back our girls – all of them!

BRING DOWN THESE WALLS

by **Katrine Camilleri**

On 11 October 2013 a fishing boat carrying around 400 men, women and children sank about 100 kilometres off the coast of Lampedusa. The people on board were refugees from Syria. They had initially sought refuge in Libya but were pushed by the increasing violence and insecurity there to seek a safer place for themselves and for their children.

Entire families boarded that fishing boat to make the journey of hope. According to some estimates, there were between 100 and 150 children on board. As they left the coast of Libya their boat was shot at by what looked like a military or coastguard vessel. It is not totally clear who it was, or why they would shoot at this fishing boat carrying refugees. What is certain is that the bullets pierced the hull of the boat, injuring some people on board and causing irreparable damage to the vessel, which immediately started taking in water. The passengers tried to bail out the water as the boat continued its journey, but by the time the boat was some 100 kilometres from Lampedusa, it became clear they were in deep trouble. The entire lower deck was submerged, the engine had failed, and they were at risk of sinking. Seeing that they were so close to Lampedusa, they made a distress call to the Italian Coast Guard to ask for assistance, only to be told that they should call the Maltese Coast Guard because they are the ones responsible for search and rescue in that area. So, just after midday, they called the Maltese Coast Guard

who assured them, repeatedly, that help was on its way. As they waited the people on the boat were getting increasingly desperate, because it was clear the boat was going down. It was only a question of time. They were trapped on the boat, in the middle of the sea, unable to do anything to save themselves or their children. By their own accounts they were crying and begging for help: 'Please, we are Syrians. We are in a dangerous situation. The boat is going to go down. We are going to die. We have more than a hundred children. Please help us'. Unfortunately, less than an hour before help reached them, the boat capsized and sank at about 5:10 in the afternoon. It is estimated that 260 people lost their lives, including 60 to 100 children. Only 26 bodies were recovered.

Of the 212 people who survived the tragedy, some were brought to Malta and others were taken to Lampedusa and Sicily. The days that followed their arrival in Malta were complete chaos and confusion. People were searching for family members,



Katrine Camilleri, photographed by Luca Catalano Gonzaga

desperately hoping they were among the survivors in Sicily and Lampedusa. A few were; most were not. Many people had to accept that their loved ones – their wife, husband, children, siblings, parents – were no more. Some people lost their entire family in this tragedy. In these terrible days, these people were meeting with anyone who would listen to them. In the days that followed the survivors tried to make sense of what had happened. They met with government officials, with NGOs, with journalists – with anyone who would listen to them really – to try to understand what went so horribly wrong and what allowed it to happen. At one meeting a man who lost two sons in the tragedy was explaining the sequence of events. He had called and called and waited. To him it seemed that their desperate pleas for help had fallen on deaf ears. He felt if only help had arrived faster, his children would have survived. Then at one point he said, ‘Of course, we are not blaming you for the death of our children. We are not stupid. We know we killed our children’. His words shocked me and left me completely cold. First of all, as a parent, I cannot imagine living with that thought. And perhaps more: I could not help but think, ‘No, you didn’t. We did. Your children are dead because of the walls we put in place to protect ourselves’. Asylum seekers make this journey only because they have no other choice. It is impossible for them to enter Europe. It is the only way for them to get protection. Many of the people on that boat had passports – valid, original, authentic passports. Many of them were professional, established, educated, and well-connected people who normally would probably be able to obtain a visa. Many had family in Europe willing to support them. Yet they had tried in vain for weeks, in some cases for months, to get a visa to come to Europe. No one was giving visas to Syrians.

The truth is, once you become a refugee, once it is clear you need protection, it is practically impossible to get a visa to travel legally into another country. For many, the only way they can seek pro-

tection is by attempting to scale the walls, putting their life, and that of their children, at risk. So every year thousands of people perish attempting to reach a place of safety.

When asylum seekers reach Europe, their problems are not over. There are other walls they have to contend with, before they are able to obtain protection. In Malta, where I come from, people who arrive by boat, even if they are asylum seekers, are detained because of their irregular migration status. Migrants rescued from vessels in distress and brought to Malta are usually placed in detention until their asylum applications are processed, which takes six to eight months on average. Those who obtain protection are released, and those whose application is rejected remain in detention for 18 months. The only exceptions to this rule are migrants in a particularly vulnerable situation and those who qualify for early release after their case is assessed, like children, whether accompanied or unaccompanied; pregnant women; people with disability; and persons with serious physical or psychological problems. It is difficult for a person who has never been detained to understand the hardship and suffering caused by detention. Detainees talk of being profoundly changed by their experience. One woman said: ‘This detention is so hard you don’t recognise the person you have become’. Interviews conducted by JRS Europe with 600 detainees in 23 member states of the European Union found that long-term detention leads to significant deterioration in mental and physical health. It is a place of great suffering. In the words of Bakarati, a detainee from Ghana who is currently detained in Malta, detention is ‘the dark side of the world, the starvation of the soul’. In addition to the hardship, in some cases detention violates basic human rights. Malta’s law and policy on detention, as well as the conditions in which migrants are detained, have been repeatedly found to breach of human rights law. And yet we are assured that keeping people behind the walls of detention centres is necessary to protect us and ‘the only way of safeguarding national security’. Once

a person is released from detention, although the physical walls are gone, there are other walls to contend with. Other walls prevent migrants from being reunited with their families and block access to rights and basic services. As a lawyer who advocates for individual asylum seekers and for improved treatment for migrants and asylum seekers in Malta, my job is essentially about working to bring down these walls or at least to lessen the impact of these walls on peoples’ lives.

uit Brother Bill Yeomans described as ‘rationalised discouragement’. Rather, he says, we are invited to go ‘beyond the slough of despond, to go into and through to a renewed and refined and more realistic hope. It is the road that leads to the realisation that the best possible service we can give the refugees is to be with them, to stick it out with them, to hope against hope with them.’ This hope is more realistic because it is grounded in the knowledge that my efforts, however small and insignificant, are

I could not help but think, ‘Your children are dead because of the walls we put in place to protect ourselves’.

Over time I came to realize what makes this work particularly hard: It is not about fighting an external enemy, an anonymous, disembodied system of border control that operates outside of us. We are fighting walls that we built and we keep there – walls that result from our fears, selfishness, and indifference; from our desire to protect what we have, even at the expense of someone else. I cannot disclaim responsibility for these walls. They are a reflection of the walls in our heads and in our hearts. I say ‘we’ because I acknowledge that I too am part of the society that built those walls to keep out those who need protection. Faced with the enormity of the task, once the initial optimism wears off, it is easy to feel disheartened and helpless and to lose hope. When years go by, when you have seen so many people suffering and nothing seems to change, it is very tempting to just lower expectations and accept that nothing will change, to succumb to what Jes-

part of something much bigger. They are part of an enterprise that spans history, one that started way before me and will continue long after I am gone: ‘the magnificent enterprise that is God’s word’, according to words attributed to Oscar Romero. God’s vision for humanity is completely different from the world we have created in our own image and likeness. Isaiah 25 talks of a ‘banquet for all peoples’, a table where everyone has a place; a world where God himself wipes away the tears from every face; a world where the ‘high walls’ of the ‘impregnable fortress’ are no more. I live and work in the hope that my efforts will contribute in some way – even though I do not fully comprehend it – toward this vision. While I remain acutely conscious of just how limited my efforts are, and very often how weak and poor my faith is, I also know that God is able to do infinitely more than we could ask or imagine. For me, this knowledge brings great



Michael Araya, 24, from Eritrea, describes his painting: 'I painted this after hearing from my friends who made it to Europe. These are refugees who made it to Libya and are risking everything to get to Italy by the Mediterranean Sea. They finally made it on a boat but there is now no one to save them'.

'The smugglers stayed on the shore, sending them off without a captain. The person driving the boat is a refugee himself who doesn't know how to drive a boat. They have no guarantee of survival. The smugglers just collect money and do not care if they arrive dead or alive'.

hope and consolation, as does the fact that I do not walk alone. I walk and work with others in the JRS family and beyond who share the same hope, not least refugees the world over, who in spite of the adversity they face, continue to hope they will be received and find protection and live with dignity.

In the years I have been doing this job, the faith of the refugees I encountered along the way has been great source of hope for me. Over time I collected so many testimonies, words and anecdotes that keep me going when my own faith falters and my hope starts to die.

One of the latest additions to my collection took place just a few days ago when I visited a JRS project for Chin refugees in Delhi. A meeting of a group of refugees started with a prayer and a song. They stood up to sing the anthem of the American Civil Rights Movement: 'We Shall Overcome'. It was incredibly moving to hear these refugees, gathered in a small room in the poor area of the city where they live, affirming their belief that, in spite of the huge difficulties they are facing and the walls they are up against: 'We shall overcome someday'. When I heard them, I thought: 'If you believe, how can I not stand with you and say that, yes, by the grace of God, together we shall overcome'.

ABOUT KATRINE CAMILLERI & JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

Katrine Camilleri is director of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Malta. A human rights lawyer, she has worked for JRS for 20 years, advocating for the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants arriving on the shores of Malta. In recent years she has focused on providing legal advice to detainees held in Malta's four detention facilities.

In 2007, Camilleri received the Nansen Refugee Award from the United Nations for her 'exceptional dedication', 'tireless efforts' and 'political courage' in assisting refugees. She has faced threats and even arson attacks on her car and home.

In December 2015, the Brussels-based newspaper *Politico* named Camilleri as one of the top 28 politicians, activists, entrepreneurs and musicians – one from each member state of the European Union 'who are stirring and shaping European public life'. JRS Malta recently published *No Giving Up: Stories of Unfinished Journeys* (2015).

Jesuit Refugee Service

In 2014, nearly 60 million people were forced to flee their homes, surpassing the number of people displaced during World War II. The number of displaced persons only increased in 2015, with new conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and ongoing wars in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria and South Sudan. While more than a million people ar-

rived in Europe last year, the majority of refugees (86 percent) wind up in developing nations, where durable solutions like integration or resettlement are rarely achieved.

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for refugees worldwide. JRS programmes are found in 45 countries, providing assistance to refugees in camps and cities, individuals displaced within their own countries, asylum seekers in cities, and those held in detention centres. The main areas of work are in the fields of education, emergency assistance, healthcare, livelihood activities and social services.

On 8 December 2015, the beginning of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, JRS launched *Mercy in Motion 2016*, a fundraising and advocacy campaign. *Mercy in Motion* supports the JRS Global Education Initiative (GEI), a five-year plan which will provide educational services to an additional 100,000 refugee children, bringing those served by JRS educational projects to 220,000. The GEI will focus on teacher training and primary, secondary and tertiary education for refugees and forcibly displaced people, providing them with life skills, quality education and concrete hope for a brighter future. (Source: JRS International)

TRANSFORM THINKING, TRANSFORM THE WORLD

by Mary McFarland and Suad Sharif

Mary McFarland: I have come to realize that great things – the things that inspire us and move us to action – start with a question, not an answer. Where will women be tomorrow? How will women get to the table of decision-making in the Catholic Church? Should I get married? Should I enter religious life?

In 2007 the deans of adult programmes at U.S. Jesuit universities convened a meeting because we had been asking how we can bridge the education-rich and education-poor areas of the world. Michael Smith, a Jesuit priest from Australia, had just returned from a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. He described people standing and watching their lives go by. He asked, 'Isn't there something we can do?' Can you imagine if you were a refugee, suddenly robbed of the life you know, escaping to a place you do not know, with no papers, driver's license or personal documents? Instead of using your skills, intelligence and energy, you find yourself watching life go by. For me, this is what hell would be like.

It is a simple question: 'Isn't there something we can do?' Well, yes. Many people have answered that question in helpful ways. At the time I was the dean of a large school with traditional and online programmes in health and leadership. I told my husband, Tom, about the question. Tom, a professor of education engaged in learning and technology, agreed that with the gifts we had in our life – two incredible children, Mike and Mindy, and now their beautiful families of Debbie, Maddie and Daniel, our loving brothers and sisters and their families, and access to education – well, we could definitely do something. Tom and I answered the question by going to the Thai-Burma border for two months to teach refugees who were students



Mary McFarland, photographed by Alessandra Zucconi



Suad Sharif (Source: UNCHR)

in the online programme of Australia Catholic University. It changed everything. Thanks to many dedicated people who have worked tirelessly since 2007, a generous donor funded what in 2010 became Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins, or JC:HEM. We defined the margins as places where people are unserved or underserved by higher education, where bright, intelligent people hunger for education, but where the world has not quite figured out how to ensure every person – girls, women, boys and men – has access to the basic human right of education.

During an assessment visit to determine if JC:HEM was needed in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, over 200 people came to tell us why higher education was needed. One man who attended said, ‘We thought the world had forgotten us. If the programme comes, we will know that is not true’.

The assessment team also noticed that in the group of over 200 there were only three women in attendance. A member of the team said, ‘Gentlemen, where are your sisters? You need to invite them. They need to come and tell us what they want to study’. Several in attendance took this literally, and they went and got their sisters. When we did the admission in Kakuma, one of the sisters who had applied was Suad Sharif.

Suad, you arrived at Kakuma as a young child. Before we talk more about our experience with JC:HEM, would you tell us about your early journey because it will help people understand life at the margins?

Suad Sharif: I left my home country in 1994 when I was very young. My earliest memory is of blood: Men attacked our home and killed my sister, grandparents and aunt. I still remember seeing my beloved people in blood. Our lives were at risk, so my immediate family fled the country. The journey was hard and long: four to seven days

of walking from Somalia to the border of Kenya. When we came to the border a Good Samaritan helped us with one room for nine people. After we stayed with there for one or two weeks, we continued on to Nairobi.

At age five, I would look out the window and see kids going to school in their uniforms, very beautiful dress, but we could not afford it. I would ask, ‘When will I get to wear the uniform and go to school?’ My dad explained we could not afford the tuition until we went to another place. Every day my father went to UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, to find us shelter. Then a group from a mosque helped us, and through UNHCR we finally relocated to Kakuma Camp. In Kakuma, however, there was never enough food or water. We would wake up by 5:00 in the morning to stand in line for water. I still wanted to go to school, but it was far from us, and we could not afford the materials like books or pens. Even as a child I was looking for primary education. I would say, ‘I am useless. I am just staying at home. I just want to go to school’. I cried a lot.

One day when I was crying to go to school, my mom asked, ‘Do you want to eat three times a day or go to school?’ We wanted to go to school, so my mom sold the ration from UNHCR. My family would eat once a day, or sometimes not at all. My parents could not buy books and pens, so a man who was a relative helped us. After a couple of years, however, when we reached middle school, the man said, ‘I paid for all these things, the tuition. Now I need one of the girls to be given to me, or give me back all the money’. I was the firstborn of the girls, so he wanted marry me. My parents could not pay the money. I cried. We went to the Jesuit Refugee Service and to UNHCR. The man threatened us. My dad feared the man would take me away, as there were no other options. I begged my dad, ‘Please let me finish high school, and then I can work and pay him’. It is a long story but it worked out. The UNHCR helped resolve the

situation. In the end I did not have to go with the man. Other girls are not so lucky. Mary, I remember when I first met you in Kakuma. I had come to an admissions interview. Later you were my teacher for the Bridge course. You used to be a dean of a large school. How did it happen that you came to Kakuma, Dzaleka and Syria?

Mary: First, Suad, your story is one of resilience and hope, and most of us cannot imagine the trauma. It is difficult to think of your family enduring this tragedy. And then we know from refugees and internally displaced people the story is replicated thousands of times. Thank you for what you shared. After the experience Tom and I had with the stu-

the world; and short courses taught on site and supported by many universities.

During the pilot years of JC:HEM, 2010 to 2013, we worked exclusively with Jesuit Refugee Service. Peter Balleis, a Jesuit priest and the (now former) international director of JRS, is a tireless advocate for the poor and a champion of every person's right to higher education. Peter invited JC:HEM to Dzaleka Camp in Malawi; Aleppo, Syria, to work with urban refugees; and Kakuma Camp in Kenya. Dzaleka is isolated but near an urban centre. In Aleppo we wanted to learn how to reach those at the margins living in urban areas. Kakuma was chosen because it is such a remote

Human resilience and the hunger for education are stronger than war.

Mary McFarland

dents on the Thai-Burma boarder, I came home and noticed that the problem I deeply wanted to help solve was access to higher education. We had the Internet, we had professors, and in Jesuit higher education we had hundreds of years of experience with transformational learning. I realized early on that the education JC:HEM could provide would be exceptional, and equally as exceptional was hearing the voices of the students in the virtual online classroom. The world would finally have access to their informed ideas. We offered two academic programmes: a diploma in liberal studies offered online, with faculty around

area – so hot, so dusty, so windy. At each location we had to figure out, with JRS and the refugees, how to get a university presence in the most rugged environments, how to get reliable Internet, power (solar), computers, and how to reach faculty around the world who would volunteer to teach. Every day we are obliged to learn what it takes to become a sustainable, scalable and transferable model of higher education. We had fantastic challenges and amazing companions to help solve them! And at every location we met students like Suad.

ABOUT MARY MCFARLAND

Mary McFarland, an American, is co-founder and international director of Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins. She taught Suad Sharif at the Kakuma Camp in Kenya.

Mary had been trained as a nurse practitioner before moving into higher education and earning a doctorate in leadership. She has served as dean of professional studies and the head of the

first online learning programs at Gonzaga University in Spokane, U.S.A.

Today she spends approximately five months of the year in the various camps and site locations and with universities and other partners who support JC:HEM. She is co-editor of Conversations on Servant-Leadership: Insights on Human Courage in Life and Work (2015).

In the winter of 2012 one of the courses in Aleppo was about to finish, and the students would graduate. The war, however, was escalating. The fuel was gone, and there was no heat or electricity. It was not safe to be out at night, especially for women. The last night of class the onsite teacher thought no one would come, but just in case he would open the classroom. Well, human resilience and the hunger for education are stronger than war. Every student came. No lights, no electricity, no heat. Every student received a candle and by candlelight they read their papers, discussed their work, and they graduated.

As with the students in Aleppo, every day I learned from Suad and all of the JC:HEM students what it meant to have a palpable hunger for education. It made sense to me. Since I shared that hunger when I was growing up, I am surprised when I am asked, 'Why educate refugees if they cannot be employed?' Most host countries mandate that refugees cannot work for wages, as citizens of the country need jobs.

Suad, how do you respond to this question?

Suad: Refugees do not want education to gain

employment. We want education to fight ignorance. Education is not about the job. Education is about life. I have learned so much. Without education I would not know about life. I went to school to have a better life and to make a difference for others. We had felt forgotten. To study online taught us to be one and to cooperate. We would console and advise each other from different perspectives from different camps. You can share your problems with others. It helps not be alone. The courses were unique and important and helped us achieve our goals. Through intercultural communication, we learned how to appreciate different cultures. I had not known about Dzaleka. I even met people who were 50 years old, and they told us about their life. They told us life is not only being in the camp. We shared phone numbers, coexisted, and became one group, one family. We shared ideas about how to study. It was a live classroom. JC:HEM gave us a world. I have been asked, 'What is a refugee?' People do not understand refugees. Education is important to learn, comfort and encourage each other. Many people believe boys should go to school but the work of girls is in the kitchen, not school. That is wrong. Girls have the same right as boys. It is a human right. If you educate one woman you edu-

cate the society. She will educate her children and her brothers and sisters – everyone. If someone in Dzaleka thought they could not continue, all the way from Kakuma in the virtual classroom I could encourage them to stay with it for a better day. One person would say, ‘We will not be refugees all of our lives. This knowledge will help us later and even now in the camp’. We became global in our thinking. Many girls and women never get to think globally or go to school. Girls are told, ‘Your place is in the kitchen. You must help take care of the family’.

Mary, you have been in the refugee camps. You know it is big challenge for everyone, and it is so hard for girls to get to go to school. I told you how I cried because I wanted to go to school so much. What other stories about girls and education has touched your heart?

Mary: Girls have a difficult time even getting to primary and secondary school, and so few women are in higher education. This is a problem for the community and the world. It is not something we can simply fix with a Band-Aid. It is going to take the voices of women and men to ensure that girls

have equal access to education. There are so many stories. They are difficult to hear but important to tell, so we do not let the world be ignorant, uninformed or unaware. Once we become aware, we are obliged to act. So I tell these stories in honour of many women. Many women cannot study because of trauma they have endured. A horror known to the world is that rape has become a strategic weapon of war. Rape traumatizes the woman, demoralizes her husband and family, and destabilizes the community. In countries like the Congo, a predominantly Catholic country where war is rampant, there are more known rapes than any other place in the world. Many Congolese women have me told their stories. When invited to study, they describe the depression, fear and nightmares that invade their minds. They need their energy to try to be a wife and a mother. Their hope is no longer for themselves but for their daughters.

A young woman in JC:HEM told another common story when she reflected on turning points in her life. As part of the Ignatian pedagogical model used by JC:HEM, each course addresses the context of learning and reflects on what has

ABOUT JESUIT COMMONS

Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins, an inventive organization that works with the Jesuit Refugee Service and other on-site and university partners, is beginning its sixth successful year of providing scalable, sustainable and transferrable higher education programs. The academic programs are offered online and on-site in refugee camps and other locations where people are unserved or underserved

by higher education. Since 2010 more than 3,500 students living in refugee camps in Kenya, Malawi, Chad and Thailand, refugees in urban areas in Syria and Jordan, students who are internally displaced in Afghanistan, as well as rural students in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, have enrolled. Additional locations are now being planned for the Congo, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and inner-city Brooklyn, U.S.A.



JC:HEM Diploma graduates in Lebanon, photographed by Christof Wolf SJ

been learned before that new knowledge is put into action. During the Bridge course students read about ‘turning points’ told through biographies and other literature, and then they write their story and reflect on the turning points in their lives and who they were before and after the turning point. The young woman told of being about age 12 when she had to flee from South Sudan to Uganda. There she lived with an ‘uncle’ whom she begged to help her go to school. He told her if she worked at the family’s guesthouse, he would pay her tuition as her wage. She worked and waited for the day to start school. Instead, one day she went in to clean a room, the door locked behind her, and she was forced to marry an older man. She eventually escaped and walked to Kakuma, where she heard she could go to school. She finished secondary school, entered JC:HEM,

and graduated. In her story she recognized she is a strong, smart, articulate young woman with a future and with much to offer her community. We learned from the ‘turning point’ stories the power of story. We heard students like this young woman tell stories, and then other students from different clans and different countries would come and stand by the person and say, ‘We have heard your story. Now we are part of it. You are not alone’. As we share the stories and hear stories, how does it create a turning point for us and where do we go with it? The Churches of the world must start to speak out on some of these issues. We are in dire need of it. During a recent assessment visit to Sri Lanka, a teacher told me, ‘Please bring the higher education programmes here. The people have had so much war. Higher education would give them some space in their mind to move from the war

ABOUT SUAD SHARIF

Suad Sharif, a Somali student at a college in Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A., was the first female head teacher of the 17 primary schools in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, where she lived for 17 years until August 2014.

After the civil war broke out in Somalia in 1991, many of her family was killed. She eventually fled Somalia with the rest of her family and embarked

on a difficult journey of hundreds of miles on foot to the border of Kenya. She finished primary school in Kakuma, earned a scholarship from the Jesuit Refugee Service to attend secondary school, and then enrolled in the online university program, Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins, and completed a diploma in liberal studies from Regis University in Denver, U.S.A.

to the future'. So I have learned from the women that faith nurtures hope for some space where the bright light of the future can dim the dark times of the past.

Suad, you are part of a small number of Somali women who get an education. I met your father in Kakuma. He and your mother were committed to get an education for you and your sisters and brothers. Your brother, Abdikarim, also graduated from the diploma programme. Since I have known you, your strength and commitment to share your education has radiated. You have made an incredible difference. Please share how you used your education to help the community.

Suad: My people and culture in Somalia believe the job of the girl is to take care of her husband and kids. When I started my JC:HEM programme in 2010, I was an assistant teacher. With my education, after about six months I was promoted to be a senior teacher, then to deputy, and then to head teacher. I was the only female out of 25 teachers. JRS had sponsored my high school, and I wanted to be a teacher because so many girls do not go to school. In JC:HEM, my Education courses taught me how to do a lesson plan. I shared my

course books with my parents, teachers and students. In the Philosophy course I learned so much about people and how to understand things from a different perspective. In the online classroom we would discuss the human search for meaning. People group themselves according to where they come from. After learning multicultural communication I helped all those from different cultures. Now we are one family. Mary McFarland was my role model. She was a simple person. She would meet with us and not worry about titles. I would meet with others from all groups, even now through Facebook. I became the first female teacher and then the first female head teacher of the 17 primary schools in Kakuma. I became the first refugee head teacher. I wanted to be their role model. I have taken courses from Tom McFarland, Karen Cordova and others. Tom McFarland met with my students and told them, 'I hope all of you will be like Suad. Study hard'. They listened. Now all those students have done well and gone to middle school. I went to the homes of families and asked them to send their girls to school – and many did. If the mothers or other young women were embarrassed that they did not have a chance to learn as children, I invited them to come to the school after the day ended. I taught them how to

read and to learn. Many came to the programme. Mary inspired me. I hope I have inspired many girls and women to study and learn. Mary, what inspired you to go to school?

Mary: My mother was my first inspiration. She worked on her family farm from the time she could walk. She had to leave home by age 14, and she worked at a bakery from 4:00 to 8:00 in the morning so she could go to high school. She was the first in her family to move away from her hometown to go to college. She became a nurse. She has worked all her life, raised five children and has never had a minute to complain. She is so smart and has always been ahead of her time. My mother knows there are many ways to learn. For me the best way was through school. My husband Tom was my next inspiration. Suad, you have had Tom as a professor so you know what I mean. He has such a love of learning that I just kept going to school to be sure I stayed interesting to him. My kids, brothers and sisters and whole family are an inspiration to me. They hear Tom and me talk about JC:HEM so much that they are a part of it. Like me, they are inspired by the stories of you and all the students. It is a wonderful circle.

Suad, we are at the conclusion of this wonderful opportunity to share some of the story. What do

you want this audience of influential leaders of faith to especially remember about our conversation?

Suad: My mother told me, 'Never lose hope, because losing hope is the last thing before you stop breathing'. We all have hopes of achieving something for the world. People here care. We can all help women to achieve their goals. As a woman today I can help two or three women to realize their dreams. Refugees need education. We say, 'Give us education, and we can do the rest'. Mary, what do you hope people remember most from our conversation?

Mary: In the 1960s, during the civil rights riots in the United States, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, 'We do not fear the shouts of our enemies. We fear the silence of our friends'. Dear friends, my concluding hope is for every religion, every Church, and every person of faith to find our unified voice to end the atrocities that deny people their right to education. Higher education: transform thinking, transform the world. Is there not something we can do together?

Suad, it has been an honour to share this session with you. Thank you.

If you educate one woman you educate the society.

Suad Sharif

DARE TO EDUCATE GIRLS

by Daphne Sequeira

'I have come that you may have life and have it to the fullest' (John 10:10). This is a promise of our Lord to all humanity, to every man and woman, rich and poor, and especially to the vulnerable and marginalized people of society. However, for most Indian women, especially in rural India, the promise is yet to become a reality.

I have come across many women who want to be educated but the culture and the system in India does not allow it. They struggle for life. They are ashamed. They are looked down upon. Their voice is suppressed. I have also come across women who, after being educated, have been an instrument of empowerment to their family, community and society.

Lily, age 26, is a tribal woman from the Catholic Diocese of Khunti in Jharkhand State, in the east of India. She has three young children, and she lives in a 'joint family' of 12 people. In the tribal belt of India, where I work, 'joint families' are a very common phenomenon. The sole means of livelihood of Lily's family is agriculture. They also raise goats and go to the forest and gather produce – like mushrooms, fruits, and wood – to sell in the market. In this area there is no public transportation. It is a hilly, forest area. Communication is very bad. To sell anything in the market they have to walk at least six kilometres through the forest.

One Saturday before Christmas, Lily was taking a goat to the weekly market. She had looked after this goat for nearly 15 months. It was well-fattened, and she expected a good price. She wanted to buy provisions for her family for Christmas. As Lily walked to the market, as often happens men from outside her village were waiting by the roadside to snatch things from helpless villagers before they could reach the market. Around one kilometre before the market, a man stopped Lily, forcibly took the goat from her and gave her just one 500 rupee banknote in exchange. She protested in a meek and frightened voice, and held on to the goat with all her might. He kept shouting, 'How much more do you want? It is not worth more than 500 rupees!' As he argued with her, he kept thrusting 10 rupee notes into her hand, one by one. He then lifted up the goat and walked away. Lily, having received many rupee notes, returned home satisfied. That evening, when she handed over the money to her family, the men scolded her for having sold the goat for just 580 rupees.



Daphne Sequeira, photographed by Luca Catalano Gonzaga



Village in Jharkhand India, photographed by Chantal Götz

The goat was worth around 2,000 rupees, they said, and the money Lily received was not even worth the fodder they had fed the goat.

A few days later, we held a meeting with the women in Lily's village. After the meeting, Lily's husband told me about the incident. I asked how he knew that 580 rupees was very little for the fattened goat, but Lily did not know. He replied that he had gone to school and passed grade 10, but she was illiterate. I asked whose fault it was that Lily imagined 580 rupees was a large amount of money. She was not able to understand the value of the notes.

This is the situation of many women in that area. They are cheated and exploited, and then quite often they are humiliated or scolded or their voice is suppressed by family members who are so-called 'educated'.

We conduct women's meetings in the villages every month. At the next meeting, I invited Lily to share her experience with the group. After listening to her, practically every woman shared how she had been exploited or not consulted when family decisions were made because she was not educated and 'did not understand'. One explained that women were often told to maintain silence. Another pointed out that it was true that they were not as educated or knowledgeable as the men. Another raised a very good question: 'Who in the family gives any thought to educating a woman?' She said she was very interested in education and had always wanted to go to school with her brothers, but her parents told her she needed to look after her younger brother and to cook for the family when they went to work in the fields. I told the women that the time and opportunity were not lost, and I asked if they would still like to be educated. In one voice they all responded, 'Yes!' Since they were so well motivated, we started a functional literacy programme in their village, and conducted classes every day for one and a half

hours, six days a week. The women were taught the alphabet and how to read numbers, distinguish currency notes, understand entries in a bank pass-book, and to write applications to government offices. Sessions were also organized on developing their potential.

Within nine months, they had learned to read and write, do bank transactions and maintain records in their Self Help Group account books. Lily is now a secretary in this group. Recently, the women had deposited their member contributions for two months in the bank, but it was not credited to their account. They had to go to the bank five times to follow up with authorities before the mistake was rectified and the entry properly recorded. When it was finally done, the women claimed that if they were not literate the bank would have cheated them of their money. This built up their confidence. Now they participate in the weekly village meetings. When important issues need to be addressed, they pressure the village leader to call a meeting. They also motivated women's groups in other villages to start literacy classes and, over the last three years, nearly 600 women have been educated through the functional literacy programme. It is wonderful to see how women's education has changed the family and community life in these villages. It has helped to improve health, livelihoods and relationships in society. And every child in these villages is enrolled in school.

Education is important for everyone, but especially for girls and women. Not only does education create opportunities, but the educational achievements of women have a ripple effect within the family, community and across generations. It is a mother who brings up the children. She manages the house and its resources. Educated women recognize the importance of health care and how to access it for their family. Education helps girls and women to learn their rights and have the confidence to claim them. The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment,

Women's education has changed the family and community life in these villages. It has helped to improve health, livelihoods and relationships in society.

and a mother's education could greatly influence household negotiations to help secure more resources for her children.

From the policy perspective, we have very sound programmes in India like the Right to Education and midday meals. To achieve gender inclusion, girls' education is provided free until the high school level. But we still need to have a conducive environment and effective mechanisms to implement these beautiful programmes and policies, which is a tremendous challenge in our country.

In India women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's, and 68 percent of school dropouts among children are girls. This does not happen automatically. There are several factors that block the education of girls.

Secondary status

The secondary status of girls is deep in Indian consciousness. Beginning with the practice of female foeticide, a girl is always referred to as someone's daughter, later someone's wife, and then someone's mother. Women are treated badly if they bear a girl and even worse if they are childless or widowed. Girls are deprived of many facilities because they are treated as belonging to another family.

Poverty

Poverty is one of the primary factors that deny girls access to education. In poor families, especially among the labour class, a girl is considered a good source of free labour to manage the domestic work at home while her parents are out in the field and her brothers go to school. In some cases young girls are made to work in the field during sowing and harvesting seasons in order to supplement family income.

Trafficking and corruption

Among the tribal-dominated states like Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, the poverty and oppression of women has resulted in trafficking. It is a burning issue. It is now a common phenomenon to send 10 to 12-year-old girls for domestic work to metropolitan cities. In some places, due to extreme poverty, parents willingly send their minor girls through agents for domestic work in cities – with the great hope of becoming rich. These agents often cheat and exploit the girls. Our tribal Women's Centre works closely with the district government on this issue. In the past three months, we have rescued 10 girls between the ages of 12 and 19 from very unpleasant situations. Most were blackmailed on their way to school and lured away by agents. Two were literally sold by their relatives.

Unsafe environment

An unsafe environment is another major factor in the number of female dropouts from school. Often an adolescent girl is not sent to school because the parents are afraid that she may be molested on the way. For this very reason parents give away their daughters in marriage before puberty, so that they do not need to worry about their protection. We still have situations of caste prejudice in our country, where a child from the lower caste is made to sit alone on the last bench in the classroom. This makes one wonder if a child born in a lower caste does not come from God!

In this context, the desire, potential, and freedom of girls are suppressed. Their lives are manipulated by others for the sake of convenience. Every time a woman is not allowed to bloom, her potential is suppressed, and her right to education is denied, we disrespect God who made us in His image and who wants us to have life to its fullest. Investment in the education of girls is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. If today's girls are educated, as mothers tomorrow they will not let their girl-child be used for domestic work or exploited to earn some income for the family, and there will

be more quality living in the family, community and society. Education helps girls to develop their potential, grow in knowledge, and be empowered for economic activities. With education she is able to face hierarchy and dialogue with a corrupt system – the way our women spoke with the bank manager. These women feel respected and loved, a basic need of any human being.

In conclusion I must say that in India the Church is working really selflessly to make quality education accessible to the less privileged. In many places where no one else has ventured, the Church has established schools and hostels for children at the margins of society. Yet there is more work to do to create a positive attitude and atmosphere in our society to welcome gender equality and to accept the fact that a girl-child, if educated, has the power and potential to transform society. We still have a long struggle ahead to usher in God's reign and to work toward fulfilling Jesus' promise, 'I have come that you may have life and have it to the fullest'.

If only one Lily and Self Help Group are promoted in every village, our nation will see very different days.

ABOUT DAPHNE SEQUEIRA

Daphne Sequeira, a member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, is director of the Centre for Women's Development in Torpa, Jharkhand, India.

She has devoted many years to the empowerment of girls and women through literacy and life skills classes and microcredit small business loans. She has worked in the poorest and most

remote areas of India, where others seldom dare to venture, looking for the unreached segments of the population: those who are unemployed, illiterate youth, Dalit women and tribal women – to give them back their identity, dignity and rights.

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WE HAVE A DREAM

After the inspiring testimonials about the empowerment of women in society, the Voices of Faith event 2015 moved into its second act with a panel discussion on the role of women in the Catholic Church. An interesting and constructive discussion among four female panelists from different cultures and backgrounds focused on the need for the church to put into practice its teaching on the equality of women and men; to use inclusive and more appropriate language when speaking about women; and to include women at the different levels of decision-making in the church. They looked at where the women are in the church today, and where they could be tomorrow.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: We have titled this discussion, 'We Have a Dream', because all of us have a dream about women's leadership in the Church.

Today we have heard a lot about women in society: how women are suffering, how women are being excluded, how their rights are being violated. Can we take that lens and look inside the Church and see the place of women in the Church today? So these four amazingly accomplished women will talk about their experiences as women working in the Catholic Church as well as their hopes and dreams and ideas for how to create a better future for the leadership of women in the Church.

Earlier today Lesley-Anne Knight asked, 'Where are the women?' It is a beautiful question. As we look at the Church we can ask that question with real legitimacy. Pope Francis has repeatedly said he wants to create a 'more incisive presence' for women in the Catholic Church. He says he holds it dear to his heart, and we know more women are being appointed to decision-making roles. For example, Sister Mary Melone has been appointed as the first rector of a pontifical university in Rome. Still, you need only one hand – actually only two fingers – to count the number of positions women hold in the Holy See from undersecretary and up. So we see movement in the Church when it

comes to women's leadership, but we also see there is an urgent need for expanding the roles of women, especially at the highest decision-making levels. With that in mind, please describe your experience as a woman working in the Catholic Church. How has it been satisfying, and how less so?

Gudrun Sailer: I am a journalist for the German Section of Vatican Radio. I'm really fond of this job. There are quite a lot of women. Roughly half of all Vatican Radio journalists are women. But it is obviously quite a clerical environment, so sometimes I wonder if some cardinal would be more open to being interviewed if he were asked by priests and not a laywoman like me. But mostly, it is not a question at all. It is a very good and respectful working environment, even if I have some career limits, being a laywoman in the Vatican.

Deborah: You have written books about women working in the Vatican. What did you find?

Gudrun: Before I came to Vatican Radio, I wondered: Am I going to be the only woman? But then I immediately discovered we are many. As a journalist, I am always keen on talking to other women who have Vatican jobs. If a press conference had eight people on the panel, and the woman was the last person to speak, afterward I would go to the woman and give her a voice. About eight years ago, I wrote a book about women working in the Vatican. There were not many. Everybody asked, 'Wow. But this is going to be a very short book – three pages or so?' [Laughter.] Today there are 762 women working at the Vatican, a little less than 20 percent of all employees. It is not much, but I think many more than people would guess.

Deborah: But what kind of positions do they hold?

Gudrun: Many of the women working for the Holy See, about 40 percent, are university graduates. They work as office leaders, historians, archivists or journalists.

Deborah: Ulla, tell us about your experience.

Ulla Gudmundson: First of all, I am very honoured to be invited here as a non-Catholic. I regard myself as a good friend of the Catholic Church who admires and respects this Church very much. During the five years I was the Swedish ambassador here, I met many male interlocutors for whom I have a great deal of respect and admiration – for their spirituality, intellectual accomplishments, competence, etc., even though we did not necessarily look eye-to-eye on the issue of women, which is one issue where I really am critical of the Catholic Church, as my interlocutors in the Curia, I think, noticed. I hope they still find me respectful and polite, but not necessarily patient and tender.

One thing that strikes me when you come as a woman ambassador to the Vatican and you begin to move about the Curia is the absence of women. I have met one single woman in a senior executive position in the Curia: Flaminia Giovanelli, undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in Justice and Peace, an excellent person. But that's it. It is a question of where you find the women, what kinds of jobs and at what level. You can find women in the Vatican – at Vatican Radio, the museums, the Vatican library – but none as a senior executive in the Secretariat of State. I find this rather odd because it seems to me that the Church, which emphasizes so much the differences between women and men and the complementarity of women and men, should be particularly eager to hear what women have to say for themselves and to have a balance of men and women in its governing structures. This situation seems a little bit illogical.

I have been struck by the way women are spoken of by high representatives of the Catholic Church. I have lost count of the number of times I have heard women addressed collectively as tender, patient, sensitive, motherly, empathic, gentle, etc.



Gudrun Sailer, Tina Beattie, Deborah Rose-Milavec, Ulla Gudmundson, Astrid Lobo Gajiwala (from left to right), photographed by Alessandra Zucconi

Those are sterling qualities urgently needed in the world today, but there is something wrong when they are collectively ascribed to a group of human beings. If I were to characterize myself, I would not use these adjectives. I would say that I'm a curious and adventurous person eager to explore the world, passionate about politics, passionate about ideas. I don't really feel this description fits me. I've had this experience many times.

Deborah: I heard you say that in your experience as ambassador, you felt there was no difference between you and your male colleagues. Is that representative of women who reach higher levels?

Ulla: Diplomacy is a male-dominated field, but I would argue that title and function always takes precedence over gender. If I represent Sweden, that is what counts, and it does not matter if I am a woman or a man. I have never, to my knowledge, been treated differently by my extremely competent and pleasant interlocutors in the Curia. That is not the problem. I find these collectively ascribed qualities problematic because it does not recognize that women are individual persons with different characteristics, different professions, different theologies, different political views. They are individuals just like men. I have the impression, for example, when I read the working document for the Synod on the Family, that there is some fear in the Church of individuality or individualism. It is interpreted as selfishness. To me it is

adulthood. We have heard in the testimonies today that it is clear women want to be treated as adults, and they want financial independence, because that means being adult in this world.

Deborah: Let's turn to Tina.

Tina Beattie: I became a Catholic soon after the birth of my fourth child, having been a Presbyterian. I was living in Zimbabwe at the time. Soon we moved to Britain, and I decided to do a university degree. As a new Catholic and a newcomer to European culture, I decided to study theology. One of the reasons for my converting had been a great respect for the intellectual coherence and riches of the Catholic tradition, its marriage of faith and reason, grace and nature, revelation and reason.

So somewhat naively I thought I'll go to university, and the university is all about intellectual questioning, rational thought, pushing questions as far as they can go. As a brand-new baby Catholic, I didn't recognize that's not always the way Catholic theologians are encouraged to think, particularly not if they're women who are also undergoing a certain conversion to feminism. My theological career has been a learning process. It's been a very rich and creative experience. I feel, as a woman in the Church, I'm very fortunate to be here at a time when, however much of a struggle we have to be heard, we are being heard, and today is evidence of that. When something is on the brink of momentous change, the struggles become most intense and ferocious. So, actually, I am very encouraged when I see lots of attempts to keep women in their place in the Church because I think that means that we are seeing change happening. In this context, when I read Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation 'Evangelii Gaudium', I think, 'This is the Church I dream of'. This is the messy, free, faithful, joyful community that I glimpsed very strongly when I joined the Church all those years ago in Zimbabwe. We have heard it today from our earlier speakers: passion for social

justice allied to the huge beauty of the Catholic cultural tradition. To me, these things are worth fighting for, preserving and promoting, and I just long for the day when women are full and equal partners in that struggle.

Deborah: Thank you, Tina. Let's move to Astrid.

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala: I have mainly worked within the institutional structures, and I must admit my experience is rather mixed. I find it very frustrating that women are excluded from decision-making because governance is linked with ordination. I have served as vice president of my parish council, but as we all know, it is merely a consultative body, and ultimately everything depends upon how the parish priest exercises his power. I have been a consultant for the Women's Commission for decades, and the truth is that all we can do is make recommendations. We do not have a vote, and there is no accountability. I find there are a lot of places where women are excluded, and I don't understand why. Today we have feminist theology. We have women professors in seminaries. We have women teach homiletics to seminarians, but these women cannot preach the homily. Recently we introduced married deacons. At least in India, the wife accompanies the spouse through the whole training process, and at the end, the husband gets ordained as a deacon, and the wife does not. I do not see its logic. It is also one more layer. First you had only the priests and now you have the married deacons. The women are one layer below. In some parts of the world you even have women religious managing parishes, but they cannot be ordained as deacons. For me this is problematic. On the other hand, I have had some wonderful experiences, at least in the Indian Church. In 1992 Bishop Bosco Penha of Mumbai was appointed to give a keynote address on women at a plenary assembly of Catholic Bishops' Conference of India [CBCI]. Of his own accord he felt, 'How can I, as a bishop, talk about women?' He requested that I speak, and I accepted. I was

PANELISTS

Deborah Rose-Milavec, the moderator of the panel, is the executive director of FutureChurch, a U.S.-based reform organization that seeks to create opportunities for Roman Catholics to participate fully in the life and leadership of the Church.

Gudrun Sailer, originally from Austria, has worked as a radio journalist in the German section of Vatican Radio in Rome since 2003. She reports on the Vatican for German television news, and has written three books about the Vatican, including two on the topic of women.

Ulla Gudmundson, a member of the Lutheran Church, served as the Swedish ambassador to the Holy See from 2008 to 2013. She has authored a book on NATO and has written numerous articles and essays on security policy, international relations, religion and liter-

ature, and she regularly contributes to *L'Osservatore Romano*.

Tina Beattie is a professor of Catholic studies and director of the Digby Stuart Research Centre at the University of Roehampton, London. Her research interests focus largely on the role and representation on women in the Church.

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala is a scientist with a doctorate in medicine who established the first tissue bank in India. A founding member of Satyashodhak, a feminist collective in Mumbai, she is a member of the Indian Theological Association and has served as assistant coordinator for Ecclesia of Women in Asia. She was the first woman to be invited to address the bishops of India at one of their plenary assemblies, and in 2008 she helped draft the gender policy of the Catholic Church of India.

very well accepted. At the end of the meeting the bishops instituted the Women's Desk under the Commission for Laity. They appointed a religious woman as secretary, and me as a consultant. Bishop Bosco worked very hard to make it a full-fledged commission, which happened in 1996. In 2008 we had a tremendous meeting on the empowerment of women. Sister Lily Francis, the secretary of the Women's Commission, was entrusted with the whole organization of this entire meeting, and she went about it in a beautiful manner. First, she organized this national-level consultation and a

number of smaller consultations at the grassroots level, including a survey, to find out from women themselves about their expectations and concerns, so we could put them on the bishops' agenda. All of it was brought to the plenary assembly of bishops. We got to choose our speakers. There were 40 women present, a first in the history of the CBCI. At that meeting the bishops decided to develop a gender policy within one year, and they did. Sister Lily Francis formed a drafting committee. We drafted the policy and gave it to the bishops. Of course they reviewed it and made some changes

which we were not too happy about, but the end product was still good. First, I really felt respected. They trusted the women to articulate their own vision. They gave us the freedom. Second, they owned this document. It is a CBCI document, but we all know that it is also a women's document because the women worked with the bishops to finish it.

Deborah: This term 'gender' has some very negative connotations in the Church. What did the Indian bishops mean by it?

Astrid: Actually, when the Indian bishops use the words 'gender policy', I think they were very simply talking about discrimination against women. In India women have a very low status, so they were looking at that and also within the Church in terms of the equality of women. They say the ultimate goal of the policy is to achieve equality between men and women.

Deborah: We have heard a little about the experience, but we also want to hear about the dreams. There has been improvement related to women in leadership. One of the most outstanding models is the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Eight of 17 members are women. Marie Collins of Ireland has long been on record saying that the bishops ought to be held accountable. On the commission her voice has been strong and clear. We still know there is much room to grow. What are your dreams and hopes for women in leadership and decision-making roles in the Catholic Church?

Tina: The Church, in 'Evangelii Gaudium', is very far along the path of fulfilling the dream. I dream of a church that proclaims the full equality and dignity of male and female made in the image of God. It should be an absolute beacon to the world, not of a kind of glossy illusion of having no problems, which I fear happens. When we hear about women in the Church, we can get this very

glossy language of a sort of romantic, maternal fantasy. I am not saying I wish the Church could be this unreal community of men and women all getting along. I wish our struggles to understand and discover the meaning of our humanity – gendered in complex ways, desiring and struggling in complex ways – I wish we were addressing those issues in the way that the world would look at us and say, 'This is how one can struggle with the complexity and tragedy of the human condition'. Instead, the tragedy is that we are part of the tragedy. The world looks at us – our daughters look at us – and say, 'But, Mum, why on earth would you hang on in a Church like that, when everywhere but the Church you are recognized and valued for who you are?' The dream is that the dignity and equality we have, being made in the image of God, were the face that the Church presents to the world. And that would have to be an absolutely fully equal face in every aspect of the Church for that to be credible.

Deborah: Put a little skin on that. How would it actually look? [Laughter.] One of the things we do in the Church is talk in very global ways. We want to have greater presence for women, a more incisive presence. What does that mean? Let's talk about it. One of the reasons I love the gender policy is because it puts some skin on it. It is a road map, a path, a way. Right now we need more of that in the Church. We have a whole chorus of voices now, all the way up to the top, saying we want a greater presence. How do we get it done?

Tina: We are told that the question of ordination is ruled out. Now, if we are asked to accept that and respect it, we have to see that in every other situation there is full and equal promotion of women's leadership, that every position that not require ordination is equally filled by men and women. That is one way of doing it, and there is absolutely no reason why that cannot happen. I would also like to see an ability to be honest and authentic about the struggles we face, and not to

keep silent because we are threatening some kind of unreal ideal. My interest is in term ‘mortality’. Every day 800 of the world’s poorest women die through childbirth-related causes, and thousands more are left with permanent injuries. Now, you will search in vain for a reference to maternal mortality in Catholic social teaching or even in the most glowing encyclicals about poverty. That is a sign of how far we have to go before we have real skin on the faces of suffering women and voices that can speak about the complexity of that suffering and what a real ethical response to it would look like.

Deborah: Thanks, Tina. Gudrun?

Gudrun: I wish two things to change: canon law and mentality. In canon law there is a big gap, not between men and women but between clerics and lay people. Cardinal Reinhard Marx said in a recent interview to *America* magazine that we have to look theologically at canon law and see which roles really require priests.

As Astrid said, leadership is connected to ordination. Cardinal Marx explained that we can revise canon law in order to have more women in leadership. The presence of women at decision-making levels is not all about juridical questions. It is also about mentality. It is a matter that goes top-down and not bottom-up, Cardinal Marx explained. The bishops and the pope have to begin that change. There is a long way to go.

Ulla is right that there are only two undersecretaries in the Vatican now, but I think things are changing. In this historic moment we could have 10 or 20 undersecretaries or even secretaries in real decision-making posts in the Vatican in the next couple of years.

Deborah: Thanks, Gudrun. Ulla, tell us a little bit about your dream.

Ulla: I would love to see the Catholic Church giving the freedom to both women and men to realize their full human potential, to emphasize more the common humanity of women and men and less the differences. If this happens, then we will have empirical evidence to know whether we are more alike or different. I would like to see women have the opportunity to be strong, courageous and intelligent, and to exercise these qualities. I would also like to see men have the opportunity to be tender, patient, sensitive, etc. [laughter and applause] because I think it is insulting and diminishing to men to imply that they are incapable of these qualities. I agree with Pope Benedict who said that fathers also have to give children unconditional love because God is our Father and he gives us unconditional love. And I think Pope Francis is a shining example of ‘feminine genius’ [laughter and applause]: patient, tender, emphasizing mercy and love. In the Catholic liturgy the female saints are described as strong and courageous and the male saints as patient and tender. It is very much in the Catholic tradition.

Deborah: Thank you. I love that. It turns the concept of ‘feminine genius’ on its head when you apply it to Pope Francis, who is out there with his arms wide open like every mother in every family, and lots of good fathers too. Thanks, Ulla. That is just brilliant. Astrid, tell us what you think.

Astrid: I dream of a Church where you simply respond to the call to service irrespective of whether you are a man or a woman. I also dream of a Church which moves from ‘power over’, which is characteristic of clericalism, to ‘power with’ and ‘power for’, which is so characteristic of servanthood. I also dream of a Church where men and women participate equally in all decision-making so they both contribute to the policies, structures, teachings and practice of the Church. And both will engage ministry.

I also would love a Church where we are con-

scientious to use inclusive language in our translations, liturgies and documents. I feel awful when I hear the word ‘man’ being used generically. I genuinely feel left out. In today’s world, in the 21st century, it is time we changed our language. When I speak of language, I would also love to see a Church where God is liberated from male constructs. Women experience God so differently, and I wish there were a place for this to expand our understanding of the mystery of God. I dream of a Church where women can give the homily like Kerry Robinson did this morning [applause], and where we can hear more stories of women in

like, ‘Oh, those are the concerns of only white, Western women’. People will say these are not the concerns of women where the church is growing in the Global South. Or, any time women want to push a boundary, people will say, ‘You’re just falling prey to secularization’. Is this movement, desire, hunger, this work for women’s leadership in the Church the product of secularization? Is it a Gospel impulse? Is it something that comes out of our Catholic social teaching? Where does it come from, and how do we defend it, if you want to defend it or stand the charges?

‘I also dream of a Church where men and women participate equally in all decision-making so they both contribute to the policies, structures, teachings and practice of the Church’.

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala

the lectionary. It is time to revise the lectionary so that we begin to see how much women have contributed to the growth and the progress of the Church, so that our contribution is affirmed and treasured like the male contribution to the Church. And of course, since I come from the Indian Church, I also dream that our gender policy will not remain a dead letter but will be a read letter and will be implemented. I am happy to say we are doing it in some ways, at least in the Church in Mumbai, and elsewhere.

Deborah: We have a few questions that will trouble our souls a little bit. As women work for leadership roles in the Church, we hear things

Tina: The whole earthly life of Jesus is framed in silencing men and giving women permission to speak. After the Annunciation, who are the first people to preach the good news of the Incarnation to the world? Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, Elizabeth greets Mary, and Mary responds in the Magnificat. After Jesus rises from the grave, the men all disappear, and then he appears to the women. Mary Magdalene is called the ‘Apostle to the Apostles’ because she was given the good news to go and preach. From the very beginning, Christianity introduced unto human consciousness new possibilities about the equality of men and women, but then very quickly the movement became institutionalized and fearful of what that

might mean. Paradoxically, I think secularism today is showing us what Christianity looks like, not in all its aspects but in the vision of gender equality, secularism is giving back to the Church a gift we have forgotten. We can learn from that. We can most certainly in some places challenge. But in order to have the credibility to challenge, we have to show that we have taken on the positive, good aspects of it.

Deborah: You say that the impulse for this really comes from our earliest traditions, traditions that we may have forgotten?

Tina: Yes. It has always been there in forgotten and neglected traditions. Today there is a lot of work on the vernacular theologies of the Middle Ages. We call them the ‘women mystics’ but that kind of pigeonholes them into a very special category. The women who did not learn scholastic Latin in the Middle Ages began to do their own forms of vernacular theology, which are more and more being recognized as orthodox, equal to the systematic tradition. It is not just taking on ‘modern values’ of equality but retrieving our histories and the forgotten voices and discovering it has been there all along. The Catholic tradition has done more than any other historical human tradition to preserve the voices of women. Unfortunately, it has always been a struggle through the ages to get those voices heard and celebrated and developed. There is a saying that men learn by standing on the shoulders of giants. In every generation, women have had to start at ground level because nobody has kept our traditional wisdom alive as a resource for us. That is what women historians and feminist theologians are doing in the Church today, but I have yet to see any of them quoted or celebrated in official church teaching.

Deborah: Gudrun, what do you think?

Gudrun: The Church in its history, from the beginning, has always been inspired by secular envi-

ronments and surroundings. The Church is not made to be closed up, but it has to be in the world, and it has to meet the needs of people today. Pope John XXIII and Vatican II said you have to interpret the signs of the time in the light of the Gospel.

The empowerment of women is a sign of the times. It is not about secularization or imitating the world but it is about recognizing that excluding women from the Church does not conform to the Gospel. It is not what the Gospel wants. We are underway but there is a long way to go.

Deborah: Thank you. Astrid?

Astrid: I feel a little sad sometimes that we call ourselves a prophetic Church, but we are always chasing what is happening in the secular world. They seem to lead the way, and we follow. Very often we follow because we are almost pushed to the wall, and we have no choice. I think that is a little sad. It is important for us to realize that God is not just present in our Scriptures and in our tradition, but God is present in the world and God speaks through other cultures, religions and the social sciences, and we have to be open to this God. That is why it is so important when you use the word ‘evolving’. So I don’t know what you mean by secularization because God speaks everywhere.

Deborah: Ulla?

Ulla: I agree with Astrid and Gudrun. We agree that the church has always developed and has a dialectic relationship with the secular world, and it has always been inspired by secular models when it has built its institutions. I agree that there is a lot to be found in tradition. There needs to be resourcing and aggiornamento, as introduced in Vatican II. I would argue that some of the women theologians who are now being cold-shouldered by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

have the same position that Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar had in the 1950s prior to the Council, and we all know what happened in the Council. I would argue, a bit provocatively, that the attitude toward women is a remnant of the preconciliar Church and an outdated, pre-Darwinian Aristotelianism. We used to think that God created the world in six days, and elephants and squirrels, and some had always looked the same. Darwin came along and said, ‘Well, it is more complex’. I think the Church has to learn that with regard to the characteristics of women and men. This Church, if you look at it, has shown amazing capacity to grow and change and take in new scientific ideas and new ideas from the secular world, so I am pretty hopeful.

Deborah: As you read Congar and look back at how he experienced those days and times, it is a little bit comforting. You do not feel so alone when you are feeling the frustration and struggles of moving these issues forward and opening things up. I would like to trouble us with just one more concept that is used quite often in the Church: complementarity. It is an interesting term and, in and of itself, a beautiful term – we all complement each other. How is it used in the church? Pope Pius XI explicitly said that women are subordinate to men. Pope Pius XII said that women and men are equal in dignity, but they complement each other, in that women have certain roles. Women are mothers. Men have other certain roles. And so on.

Gudrun: In my experience as a family mother, we are very complementary but it is just the opposite. I have the ‘role of a male’ in the family, and my husband is the one who does all the cooking and the cleaning. Every family has to figure it out.

Deborah: I think the gender policy of the Catholic Church of India has the truer sense of complementarity. It is about how our gifts complement each other.

Tina: I heard someone who thought that ‘complementarity’ meant that every day a husband should tell his wife she looks nice. [Laughter.]

Ulla: As you said, complementarity is a historical concept. I have to share an anecdote. A very high-ranking person in your church once said to me, ‘My Church develops in this way: First, something is prohibited. Then it becomes allowed but only as an exception. Then the bishops see that it works very well, and it becomes admitted. Then it becomes compulsory’. [Laughter.] He then said, ‘We are at point one with the ordination of women, point two with married clergy’.

Astrid: I agree with what Ulla said about the qualities: they are not gender-based but human qualities.

Deborah: I want to end with a thank you to Chantal Götz. She has been a wonderful leader for us, really leading forward the conversation for women in the Church. Today, at the Mass with Archbishop Anil Couto, in my 60 years as a Catholic I have never heard someone preach the equality between men and women so clearly. That homily and this event and all the people who have come before us have been such a tremendous gift for which I am deeply grateful. As a grandmother of 11 and mother of six, I have a lot of skin in this game, and I want to see the Church go on. So thank you all.

ABOUT



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The Fidel Götz Foundation is a charitable trust established in 1967. Its mission is to work with the Church and Catholic organizations to provide opportunities for a just and equal world. Its core area of focus is education.

Editor Luke Hansen

Luke Hansen, an American Jesuit and a student at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley, California, is the editor of VOICES. Luke served as an associate editor of America, the U.S. Jesuit weekly magazine, from 2012 to 2014. He has reported from Vatican, Honduras, El Salvador, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (U.S.A.), and the U.S. military prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and he has won several awards from the Catholic Press Association for his writing. He has also interviewed several top Church officials including Cardinal Peter Turkson and Cardinal Reinhard Marx. As part of his priestly formation program, he is involved in projects that promote the leadership and ministry of women in the Catholic Church. Luke said he feels 'very privileged' to assist with the first edition of VOICES and to revisit the 'heartbreaking and hopeful' stories of these amazing women which continue to inspire his ministry.

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