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symbols of the Gospel message. They are relational and concrete. They are the Gospel incarnate in life. For many they are more convincing than verbal proclamation.

Evangelism as the verbal witness to the Gospel is itself holistic for evangelism is seeking individual responses; but it is more than this. It is social in its method and goals. In third world situations it is nearly always communal. The family is the unit of society and in all decisionmaking processes. In the conversions recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, so often it is the whole family and a man's household who are converted and baptised.

In the context of the enormous amount of human suffering and oppression in the world, there is no substitute for compassionate caring for both the people of God and all who are suffering irrespective of race, social status or religious belief. Compassionate concern is the mark of true servanthood; it is our response of love to Him who first loved us. Service is not conditional upon results or on opportunities for evangelistic witness. It is our compulsive response to people in need. In many closed societies particularly in Islamic context, compassionate service may be the only form of witness possible. It is the parable of the Good Samaritan in modern dress.

Social justice begins with the prophetic rebuke of all forms of personal sin and institutionalised evil, and cannot be isolated from either compassionate caring or evangelism. The revival of the Social Gospel Movement launched a century ago is doomed to repeat its earlier failure if it is isolated from spiritual transformation. Economic reconstruction alone is no cure for the social ills of our age. Bribery, corruption and selfish greed are the fundamental causes of poverty. Marxism failed because it failed to transform human nature. Chou en Lai saw this in China four decades ago, but he had no gospel to offer to bring about this change. Similarly to resort to violence to achieve social justice is no solution, for violence begets violence. If we change the structures without changing relationships we only change one form of oppression for another, a mistake all too often being repeated in our time.

The creation of a compassionate and just community as a model for society is necessary, but is only a beginning. Commitment to God's agenda in the world calls for commitment to praxis. Liberation theologians are right in their emphasis on praxis, though we may not agree with their presuppositions and methods for achieving justice. Christ commissions us to be in the world but not of the world. [p. 231](#)

In the words of the recent *Lambeth Documents*, Mission is:

proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ;
teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers;
responding to need with loving service;
working to transform unjust structures. [p. 232](#)

Women in Africa in the Process of Adjustment and Change

Daisy N. Nwachuku

I met Dr. Daisy Nwachuku at a conference in Oxford last year and commissioned her to write an article on the situation of women in Africa and their role in Church and mission. Her penetrating insights into the suffering and oppression of women caught in the process of rapid social change are very disturbing, and call for a much deeper biblical and theological reflection and praxis than evangelicals are accustomed to. This article is only a sign post. Let the theologians respond in word and deed!

Editor

INTRODUCTION

Many factors have shaped the situation in Africa today. It must be emphasised right from the start that Africa is so diverse in its people, language, cultural heritage, traditional laws and customs, and differing stages of national development, that no African can claim to make authoritative statements for the whole of Africa. Even within the same geographical region of north-south, east-west dichotomies, being Christian, Muslim, of Africa religion and also considering colonial history of who colonized who, for how long, when independence was granted, and how—all these factors penetrate into the whole fabric of life and the situation of the people today. Therefore, the term ‘The African’ is always ambiguous except when used within a specific context and relativity. Within this frame of reference, we shall then examine people in Africa in their contexts; remembering that when one talks of women’s issues, this complex situation becomes even more so!

I will address myself to situations which I believe are fairly common and exist only in patriarchal communities, because life is very different in matriachal societies. Even within this limitation there are bound to be variations. We shall adopt the life story method, drawing issues for analysis from the real life contexts of the case studies presented. This will guard against the obvious error of overgeneralization. The analysis and interpretations will be given as a point [p. 233](#) of view, leaving enough room for people to make their own interpretations in dialogue. Not long ago, a woman in her late 40s talked with me in Lagos, Nigeria’s largest city. Our conversation lasted more than an hour, and her main concern was why she should not be allowed by her husband and her in-laws to own her own property. Since she is a lawyer, I concluded that her preoccupation over property rights was an indirect effect of her profession on her private life. However, despite strong opinions expressed against customary practices and traditional structures, the fundamental issues underlying her concern were female oppression, denial of inheritance rights, general denial of fundamental human rights on gender basis and general downgrading of women. But what were her alternatives, I asked her? ‘I must fight, and continue to fight on these issues’, she said. Using her professional expertise, she was determined to press for change in legislation on gender equality. But how much could she achieve from her office?

I. CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS IN STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Women, children and the old are always the first group to be protected during a crisis. The concept of weakness upon which this security is provided, good as it seems, is unfortunately the same concept that has led to structurally in-built barriers and prejudices against the very group meant to be protected. Although women, children, the aged and minority ethnic groups share the same social concerns worldwide, attention will be focused on women in this paper.

Change presupposes a recognizable difference from a previous state, variation from an established standard or a substitute of one for another. Rather than seek to maintain

the status quo, change digresses, diversifies, dilutes or even diffuses in order to incorporate new features and drop or replace old ones. In other words, the phenomenon of change actually undermines the status quo in order to establish a new order, a new state of affairs and a new status quo. This chain of events calls for a complementary process of adjustment relative to the needs of the organism affected in the re-ordering process. Where the adjustment is positive, growth and progress results; where negative, the result is either regression or disintegration leading to chaos.

The paradox and perhaps the dilemma of the present situation for the woman in Africa is that while society is fast changing its structures in principle, yet in practice, the same society expects the powerless minorities (women, children, the aged and minority ethnic groups) to remain unchanged in their traditionally prescribed roles and functions. [p. 234](#) Consequently, what results is dynamic structural change on the one hand, in tension with systemic rôles prescription ingrained in the old structure on the other hand. At best, most of the old rôles are recycled in new patterns of communication, interpreted and conveyed as usual, from the dominant 'powerful' pace setters to the subordinate 'powerless' recipients of social, political, economic and religious interpretations. Therefore, since men are the dominant group in patriachal communities, more often than not they interpret situations to their advantage, perhaps inadvertently rather than deliberately, even in a changed order.

In this state of conflict and tension, adjustment to the new emerging structures causes great pain. Both the powerful and the powerless come under great rôle strain. In effect, greater pain is faced by the powerless who are threatened by rôle sanctions. In order to rebalance the status quo without resolving the conflict, what happens in reality is that the pain of the powerful gets diffused, hidden or disguised into several behavioural response strategies, some of which carry within them death-delivering symbols. We shall give two examples to illustrate the seriousness of this mechanism.

Firstly, universal franchise is a political, structural change in Africa that has granted women voting rights in principle. But in reality women are prevented from exercising this human right by religious rôle interpretations given by men in Muslim ethnic groups. To act otherwise is out of norm with the behavioural expectations in the Muslim community of faith to which the woman belongs. A persistent defiance of the old norm in order to use her new rights leads to alienation and possibly ostracism.

Secondly, the introduction of universal primary education is a social, structural change which grants the right of education and full development to every child. This principle is upheld presently in every African nation. But in reality, social preference favours the male child in a patriachal community whenever the need arises for a decision on which of the children gets education in the face of low family income. In the majority of cases female educational opportunity is sacrificed to the male, especially in poor families. This decision is forced to be made in a fairly predictable male preference due to the system of inheritance (primarily land and cash crop property) and also due to the compulsive need to maintain the continuity of the family genealogy among the ethnic group, thus perpetuating the life of the community.

The male-female preference has been a sociological factor grossly misinterpreted and misunderstood by foreign anthropologists. The crucial issue which Western anthropologists fail to understand is that [p. 235](#) Africa is community-oriented as opposed to city orientation. Even with modern urbanization, communities have survived and thrive along ethnic lines which foreign anthropologists describe as 'tribal'. This is a misnomer that distorts the concept of life and community which African ethnicity holds onto. A destabilisation of continuity of life by any factor of change becomes a potential

threat of annihilation of a community; hence, single life, single parenthood, and widowhood are perceived as social threats and resisted as vehemently as are epidemics.

In a few extreme cases, a young female African, especially from a poor family, may defy the rôle boundaries, break loose from tradition, escape into the city, and resort to disguised prostitution to pay her way through education in the belief that paper qualifications will enhance her employment opportunities. This adjustment process in turn earns her the social stigma of being of low morality. The female in response turns her back on the community and seeks marriage far from home. Adjustment in this case leads to broken lives and fragmented communities.

In general, the fate of a young woman in Africa today, whether from a poor or rich family, is embedded in structural tensions that exact costs. Choosing to be purely traditional implies a detachment from the irrevocable change processes around her. Choosing to be modern calls for contending with emerging foreign lifestyles which are alien to her roots and frowned on in her community among the very people she seeks to be fully accepted by as a person of worth and integrity. In this dilemma, most women in Africa adopt what we may call in this discussion 'a synthesis approach' to adjustment.

Adjustment by synthesis is laden with risks of survival, approval or condemnation. It would be highly presumptive if not totally erroneous to believe that the burden of adjustments to change falls only on women. Both men and women face this responsibility. However, coming from a perception and feeling of powerlessness in terms of who prescribes rôles in the society and for whom, the burden of adjustment to social change falls more heavily on women. Very often the impact of contradictions faced by women in developing countries as they strive to adjust is ignored or marginalized.

II. IDENTIFIABLE CASE STUDIES

We shall now turn to real life stories of women under adjustment. There are four distinct categories into which many women in many African countries fit. We shall highlight each category with an **P. 236** identified life story. Although sharp lines cannot be drawn in certain areas of commonality yet, certain characteristics are unique with each of the four life situations. We shall examine the life story of Nkema who is an archetype; Ema, Ugo and Mazuka who are prototypes of Nkema.

The Vulnerability of Poor Women Under Adjustment in Female-Headed Households

Nkema's Story:

We visited Nkema. The story of her life—what we saw and heard from her account—struck us with amazement, horror, challenge and admiration for her courage, faith and hope of survival. Nkema is a 42 year old widow. She has six children, two boys and four girls, and they live in a mud house belonging to her late husband in a semi-rural village in the eastern part of Nigeria. She is a member of one of the pentecostal churches in her village.

During the rainy season which lasts for six months, her three rooms are flooded due to a completely worn out thatched roof. She and her children sit or sleep on raised platforms made out of wooden logs until the floors dry. Since most young men who engage in thatch-making have left the village for the cities, rural housing now makes use of zinc roofing in the place of thatch. Nkema can afford neither the cost of thatch nor the exorbitant price of zinc.

In a patriachal community, it is essential to provide her son with good economic standing, since he is the hope of the family survival both in economy and progeny. She

was thus compelled to pledge all available property as collateral to Credit Union to pay his way through primary school. In order to provide him with a trade, Nkema gave away her third daughter aged eight, as a pawn to a rich mistress in the city, from whom she raised the necessary loan to pay for her son's apprenticeship in cabinet making. Her first daughter had to drop out of school to assist her brother's schooling. The second daughter, frightened of her mother's and sister's plight, dropped out of school (since that would eventually be her fate anyway), and, desirous to escape from the vicious circle of poverty in the family, she eloped with a young man to the city where both now engage in street hawking. She already had three children at the time of the interview, at age twentytwo. As she is not formally married, the future of the three children born while co-habiting is questionable since the young man can decide to reject her and her children and choose his actual bride with whom to raise a 'proper family'. In effect, the stress faced by this young p. 237 mother because of her adjustment strategy is worse than her mother's. She has no claim to a married home, no security of kindred or lineage for her children and no dignity among her own people because she brought her kinsfolk to shame by consenting to elope with a man without formal marriage. She seems to be a failure already and her future is a great source of added worry to her mother.

As a woman, Nkema has no rights to property ownership, especially family lands. Her status of widowhood (symbolically referred to among this ethnic group as 'the woman with shaven head' or 'woman in black') limits human rights to the barest minimum because traditionally she is now 'mute'. The loss of a husband was equivalent to loss of voice amongst her kinsfolk. Her right of speech could be restored if she has an adult male child. But at the time of her husband's death, her two sons were minors and administration of her family land reverted to the overall head of the extended family. Reclaiming the portion that belongs to her husband could be done by her first-born son at adulthood. However, such cases can result in grim rivalries between grandsons, cousins and uncles, often ending with protracted law suits. Meanwhile Nkema's alternative is to depend on the mercy of the family head for a piece of land for farming. She subsidises whatever she gets by purchasing other plots as a 'share-cropper'. In addition, she and her children work as daily farm labourers to rich landlords or as casual labourers, carrying mortar and bricks at building sites.

Nkema's situation of poverty and vulnerability became more stressful due to her refusal to enter into 'Levirate Marriage' with her late husband's next of kin as a sign of acceptance of continued male security within the family circle. This assertion of her right to self-determination earned her unsympathetic disregard and neglect. Her little boy, last of the six, at seven years of age faces spasmodic primary schooling which gets interrupted whenever he goes to help out in the farm or stays home to help in food processing. Gradually, he lost interest completely after only two years of schooling. Besides, the little boy feels frustrated at his teachers' harassment over coming to school with no textbooks, no writing materials, poorly fed and with no school uniform.

For Kkema and her children, life is one long gruelling struggle. Their day starts as early as five o'clock either on the farms or construction sites and ends as late as ten at night with late meals. Working between 15 and 17 hours daily, six days a week, their food is routinely starch with poor soup. Economic survival looks hopeless as she experiences her son's lack of access to a start-off credit with which to set up the much expected cottage cabinet business. From time to time, she p. 238 looks up to the sky searching for God. In her own words she said, 'I wonder if God really hears the cry of people like me? But then who else have I, if not God?' With these words of assurance, she lives on from day-to-day with hope of eventual deliverance.

Nkema is representative of millions of female-headed households of the rural African poor who are mostly women, children and young jobless adults. The most vulnerable, poorest of the poor among this group can be found among widows.

In reference to women in Africa in general who belong to this category, it is estimated that more than 100 million of the population of Nigeria are women. Some countries in Southern Africa would have a higher percentage due to men's deaths in the civil wars, for example in Angola. Within the population of women, about 80% still live in rural areas and 60–70% are engaged in agriculture. These women, even the non-widows, work very hard to maintain their families either through farming, petty trading or through street vending, carrying heavy loads on their heads and walking miles daily to earn a living. Added to the onus of finding bread, the women and their children have to walk miles in search of drinking water and cooking fuel. Back home at night, the gruelling tasks of labour-intensive food processing for the next day, cooking for the night meal, serving, bathing the little ones and washing the dishes still rest traditionally with the woman and her children. Thus, the average working hours for this category of woman range from 15–17 hours daily except for Sundays. Several recent studies have indicated that this common fate befalls many women in Asia also. (Ogbuagu, 1990; Commonwealth Studies, 1989; Mohammed, 1987; Ode, 1990; Nigeria Population Bureau, 1986; Women Under Racism, 1990; and Women of Africa Speak Out, 1989.)

Women in Conflict under Adjustment

Ema's Story:

Ema, 35 years old, lives in a city of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. She is a medical doctor, married with four children. Her husband is an accountant in the city bank. As they were married late due to prolonged schooling, their oldest child is eight and in primary school with their second child. The other two are in a nursery school. All the four children attend high fee-paying private schools which takes a heavy toll of family earnings.

Ema spends long and hectic hours at the hospital. After office hours, she engages in private practice and has registered for professional p. 239 examinations in paediatrics. Torn between the hospital, her private clinic, her study and her anxiety to qualify as a consultant paediatrician, her marriage relationship comes under great tensions very often, which drives her to seek therapy in a family counselling clinic. Healthwise, stress of over-work is beginning to show in her blood pressure even at the age of 35.

Ema's internal conflict gradually heightened due to the increase of the hospital management board's harassment of her either to succeed in the professional examination or be thrown out from the teaching hospital. At home, the insufficiency of income to match the family lifestyle has caused a drop in their eating and other standards.

As an immediate coping strategem, her car was 'grounded' on agreement between the couple that the two would use her husband's car in order to cut down on costs. However, this adjustment measure has led to predictable quarrels over whose time schedule controls the car. Her husband, as a banker, habitually comes home late at night after the books are balanced. Ema's frequent emergency calls back to the hospital create long absences. Their children are neglected by the couple due to work. Her husband and the children feel abandoned while they are home and she is out, and they complain bitterly. Ema feels torn apart by working hard for the comfort of everybody and yet faces severe and unsympathetic criticism of her self-sacrificing efforts to be a hard working, good wife and mother. Finally she decided to abandon her career interest and ambition to become a pediatric consultant and drops the idea of examination in order to salvage her marriage. In principle this meant loss of her job at the teaching hospital. Taking up a fresh job as a general practitioner at a state general hospital left her feeling unfulfilled in her career.

Meanwhile, Ema's husband faces a 'promotion freeze' at the bank due to the national economic Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The economic programme was adopted to meet the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions imposed to combat Nigeria's debt crisis. The burden of the family's economic crisis falls on Ema as the home manager. In order to keep the children in private schools, Ema takes up family cottage poultry.

As a medical doctor, she was able to get her employer to sign as collateral for an agricultural loan to start the poultry. This additional, income-generating project puts further stress on her own personal welfare and has increased the family work load. Her husband does not feel obliged to help out, either with the poultry or with domestic chores since he believes that all these are traditionally women's work.

There is also a lingering unresolved issue of what percentage of [p. 240](#) Ema's salary and the proceeds from her poultry should be turned over to her husband as the head of the family. Ema does not mind turning over the money but demands proper accounting of the family finances. Her husband feels it is not traditionally acceptable for a wife to demand such rights from her husband in the home. The in-laws encourage him to 'be a man' in his own home irrespective of his wife's status. This interference adds to the subtle tension. Ema still has to worry about paying back the agricultural loan.

Caught up in the dilemma of worker, wife, mother, conflict and stress in running a home which is in neither African nor Western life style, and a frustrated career future, Ema lives with modern tensions and the stresses of her times. To women like Nkema, Ema, a 'woman-doctor' appears to be privileged with education, status, power, wealth and a good life. But to Ema, life seems as questionable as it is to Nkema with the same old 'woman stories' recycled in new patterns. As a woman in Africa who has embraced change fully, Ema is caught in a double bind. She seems not to have properly accepted as well as organized for the traditional expectations made on her as a woman whose place is in the home; a producer, mother and community organizer on the one hand, she seems almost strangled by the demands of modernization, profession and attainment on the other. She lives in the continuous conflict of being appreciated as a wife of status, a mother of children and a community organizer ready to cure all diseases; and yet, severely criticised for having so much power and autonomy as a wife! Ema's personal life, welfare, marriage, time and income all come under daily pressure of adjustment.

Much of the same story can be told of thousands of Africa's growing middle class of literate, professional women now in all walks of life in the cities and villages. While they seem to have embraced change, they also share the same traditional fate with the rest of women. Such dilemmas cast a spell of looming frustrations on this class of women which condemns them to continuous readjustment.

Crisis of Upper Class Women Under Political Change

Stories of Ugo and Mazuku:

Between the extremities of life experienced by Nkema in the rural, informal sector and Ema in the urban, formal labour sector we see several variations.

Ugo

Ugo, a 35 year old wife of a company director in Nigeria has two little [p. 241](#) children and is a full-time housewife. Born in a rich family and married by a rich man, she is refused the right to work in the belief that she does not need to slave for a meagre salary, although she holds a Bachelor of Arts degree. She and her children are well provided for and the domestic chores are done by paid company staff.

However, Ugo has an identity crisis in being reduced to consumer status all her life in an age when her peers are making their mark on national history in all areas of life. She therefore secretly seeks therapy on how to deal with self-awareness, self assertiveness, value clarification, sense of worth and how to recapture and protect her integrity. She feels extremely westernized to a point of nostalgia for the life of simple folk in her village, with less protocol. The political instability in her country adds to her stress because she fears that if there were another *coup d'état*, surely her husband would be among those executed or arrested.

Her husband cannot understand Ugo's state of boredom. He considers her ungrateful and her fears irrational. He cannot tolerate the implications of a working wife who neglects home, rushes out of the house in the mornings and returns late in the evenings. He also has great conflicts over a woman who could feel that she is a breadwinner which empowers her to contend for rights, power and authority in rivalry with her husband in the home. His slogan is 'behind a successful man there is a woman, never in front of him'. Although he is an engineer, his concept of male-female headship remains traditionally African and non-negotiable.

Ugo has no sympathy from either her parents or peers who fail to understand her. At the time of the interview she had withdrawn into self-alienation and was under great fear, anxiety and stress. Her marital relationship was under unspoken tension and her life seemed crushed by a great sense of power and money overshadowing her, and she was burdened as to how to cope with her own sense of powerlessness which no-one else could understand.

Ugo represents women in the few millionaire and upper-class families who are faced with the struggle of being both traditional Africans and westernized elite with great financial power among the masses of their poor, illiterate and hungry village kinsfolk. The contradictions of blessings and crisis keep them in constant search for a more acceptable lifestyle. The rising number of divorce cases in Africa come from Ema and Ugo's class.

Mazuku

Mazuku differs from the other three women. She is 40 years old, from [p. 242](#) one of the southern African countries, single, mother of a teenage daughter and chief executive of one of the international companies in her country. Her life story flows from her experiences in the political struggles of her country, especially between the black majority and white minority. She grew up in black reservations, bitter towards racism and rebellious against association with white governments. Yet, one of her puzzles is that her two best friends in life are her two white teachers, one in the high school and the other in the university. She said in deep reflection, 'I know it is the racist system I hate, not people.' (The book *Women Under Racism* narrates several life stories of women from all over the world similar to Mazuku).

Mazuku is also bitter towards her own people because of the way the guerrilla soldiers brutalized the local, defenceless women and forced them to provide the food and clothing needed to sustain the guerrilla operations. She hates the slogan, 'Forward with the cooking stick' as being the only way women's war efforts were remembered after independence. 'They did more than cooking', she said, 'but men find it hard to let women share any credit.'

She remained single because most men, her peers, died during the war of liberation. She talks lovingly of the young widows whose husbands were war victims. She felt she needed a child of her own and so had just one daughter; she did not consider the relationship would make a good marriage and so ended it. She has sworn to fight some aspects of her culture and of the new social changes which she believes are oppressive to women, such as the concept that a woman is incomplete and cannot be remembered as

an ancestor if she has not married or has no children; the statutory law that forbids child adoption by a single woman and the African attitude that despises adoption as an alternative for a childless couple.

She finds a puzzling challenge in the return of the younger generation to spiritism and ritualistic sacrifices of cleansing from blood, a strong old African purificatory rite performed for a young man who took part in bloodshed in any war. She admits that Christianity has not quite succeeded in breaking through to change African spirituality totally.

Politically, professionally and socially well placed, in a position of leadership, Mazuku sees her situation as that of providing models for the young generation of women in transition in her country. Her joys derive from the strength in the African women to cope with life in the presence of severe adversities. But her tensions and tasks are found in her fight against lingering cultural attitudes and practices of oppression and exploitation of women, political wars, racist attitudes, and even [p. 243](#) oppression of women by other women. Mazuku represents thousands of Africa's women today who are both victims and beneficiaries of political, economic and social changes of a continent in transition.

III. WOMEN IN TRANSITION

Our Stories

We can each find ourselves and our stories in these four women. Each of the four categories is also symbolic of the many facets of life and change a female child born in Africa today is most likely to face. Nkema symbolises the courage and fortitude among the masses of illiterate rural and urban slum women who seem to survive from day to day in situations that might prove unbearable to others. Ema typifies the majority of the literate, professional, self-aware and powerful class who have both financial and communication powers; and have competitively gone into the labour force, vigorously combining all the basic roles of producer, mother, home manager and community organizer. Ugo's struggles highlight the ambivalence of African affluence of the old style among chiefs and rich landlords and the new elitist financier in the Western style. Mazuku incorporates innovations that modern female adjustment and change introduce which would have been social taboos in the Africa of old, struggling in public power sharing, questioning the old order and yet clinging to it in fear of loosening roots.

Collectively, women in Africa today are in transition. This means women in poverty as well as wealth, in illiteracy and education, women oppressed and women oppressors, admired as well as hated, women in war and peace, in power and powerless, and women in freedom as well as in bondage. We might perhaps be better called women in paradox situations. Our collective stories therefore present complexities that call for closer analysis.

Our Collective Adjustment Strategies

Historically, women taking action collectively against social injustice is not new to Africa, at least not new as the past few decades have projected it within the context of Western feminism. Without acting under the nomenclature of 'feminism', African women as a group possess enormous social and political power to exert great political and social changes. In this collective capacity they function as effective community organizers and builders. The Aba Women's Riot which led to the Women's War of 1929 succeeded in nullifying the British [p. 244](#) imposition of poll tax on unemployed women (Nwagwru 1973, Akpan, E. O. and Ekpa, V. L. 1988), and the Zimbabwe rural women guerrillas who

helped to bring black majority rule are good examples. The traditional strategy of collective response also includes support teams for collective labour, financial help, teams such as childbirth assistance teams, bereavement teams etc. Joys and crises are collectively shared and people like Nkema draw great survival strength from this system.

This indigenous adjustment strategy has evolved in recent times into several women's action networks, non-governmental groups (NGOs), economic co-operatives, credit union groups, professional groups and even women's evangelistic groups. Some of these are formed on ethnic, social, religious, economic or professional commonalities. Irrespective of their basis of formation, they all have one common goal of action, to support the need for women to speak with one voice, to resist negative changes and to make demands for improvements through political religious and social pressure, lobbying, media propaganda, protest marches and dialogue. Some of these actions are well documented (Women in Nigeria, (WIN) document 1989; All Africa Conference of Churches Continental Conference (AACC), 1989); World Council of Churches (WCC); Women's Decade Links; and Oxfam's GADU). In many African countries these network groups have become a strong negotiating force in both government and church.

Our Individual Adjustment Strategies

In addition to collective response to social changes, there has also been widespread sharing of self-help strategies among rural and urban women in solidarity. The following are some highlights.

Team bulk purchases of groceries which maximise savings.

Neighbourhood cold storage systems where wealthier women in a neighbourhood make their refrigerators available to poorer or younger women to store their food. This kind of help strengthens the support system and builds a community.

Free public seminars organised by support groups on women's health issues such as causes of cancer, maternal mortality, home management, budgeting, new adaptable recipes, creativity and inventiveness to combat the negative effects of income cuts on family health, nutrition and social amenities.

Personal readjustment of welfare, preference, refurbishing of cars [p. 245](#) and wardrobes instead of buying new ones, in order to ensure family survival.

Women in Search of Clarity

There is need for society as a whole and women themselves in particular, to re-examine the nature of the struggle in Africa and the alternatives being suggested.

Whereas some women feel they have never been in bondage and so do not understand women's fight for freedom, others feel that what they need is help to enable them to cope with the social and technological changes which confront them. Yet other women see adjustment as part of a life process, which needs no special ability other than to grow with the times.

The growing complexity of perception and opinion among women themselves on the nature of the issues calls for clarity. Part of the lack of unison in women's voices across the board springs from the unclear distinction between what is expected of a truly modern African as opposed to a traditional African. Working out the dynamics of this distinction (or possibly a synthesis) and resolving the split personality into wholeness is perhaps the most crucial issue facing women in Africa today. This process carries with it political, economic, social, religious and psychological costs which have been vividly exemplified in our case studies.

A second issue for re-consideration is that of 'power sharing', which lies at the root of all struggle against injustice. African men and women need to re-examine these questions: Who holds the power?

Do those who hold the power use it to assist the powerless to rise to their full human potential?

Are the powerful willing to share their power?

In what proportion and in what areas?

Are the currently powerless willing to let go the pains of the past and rise to build together a future healthier society?

As community builders, the goal for women in Africa should be to press for changes which have both male and female aspects. If the case has been made against a male dominated society, tilting the pendulum towards female domination would be a counter-productive adjustment strategy. Therefore, in pursuing women's issues, a balance is needed and should be sought.

A Nigerian woman University Vice-Chancellor, Grace Alele Williams (1990:13) summarises the issue of balance thus: [p. 246](#)

Our society, like most progressive societies, must seek harmony in the home and in the community, on the basis of complementary rôles between men and women ... The problem of freedom which is the main task of history whether of an ethnic minority or of a religious group or even women, is a question of unequal relationship to social life. A progressive society is one which is neutral to all its constituent elements and that accords them the same rights and opportunities. The Nigerian woman must continue her uphill task to contribute fully to the development of Nigerian society.

IV. PASTORAL CARE FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA

The pastoral response of the African Church to women in Africa has a history of treading a deliberately cautious path, not wanting to rock the male-female boat (which is usually captained by men). In this situation, pastoral response has at times been in solidarity with women against social injustice. But at other times, pastoral response has evaded issues when, as a caring ministry, it should have spoken out or acted. Sadly, there is a yet worse situation, when pastoral care has colluded with sexist, traditional sanctions and customs. (For example, its present position on the ordination of women.) Therefore it has to be said that pastoral response to women's issues in Africa has been greatly conditioned by the social climate.

There is need for a much more clearly defined and committed line of action. The launching of the WCC decade of churches in solidarity with women in several dioceses has helped to bring about a more focused and committed effort by the Church to deal with women's issues. So long as human rights deprivation and social injustice against women on any scale continues, pastoral care in Africa owes the Christian community active assistance in dealing with what still remains in society of oppressive attitudes to women.

Pastoral care can play two effective roles at this stage.

Firstly, the Church needs to step up its former supportive role by continuing its crusade against remaining change-resistant, death-delivering structures by speaking out loud and clear from the pulpit. Sermons that seek to refine the identified customs and improve them for a healthier community would then enable pastoral care to address such issues practically. Practical actions from church care teams would in turn empower and encourage women in their efforts to make changes.

Secondly, in the present situation of heightened social tension between male dominated systems, and female demands for either reordering, [p. 247](#) reversals, or

inclusion, pastoral care should act as the 'enabler' of both men and women towards healing and wholeness in one community. By adopting this rôle, pastoral care would foster complementarity and peaceful co-existence. This process of adjustment involves both sexes, and leads to the building of a new community of faith where both men and women are truly themselves in the image of God, joint-heirs of God through Christ and partners in grace through faith ([Romans 8:17](#), [1 Peter 3:7](#)).

A holistic stewardship of care, fostered by pastoral care ministry would recreate new and positive male-female images and symbolism in the language and thought pattern of the new community which is today emerging from Africa's current transitional period. It will, in effect, forestall in the new African society, the unnecessary extremes to which sexist rivalries, arguments and debates in contemporary male-female relationships have been driven in the modern world.

Pastoral response in Africa will fall short of its responsibility if it does not empower the poor (in this case, women), to become the subjects of their own action rather than to remain objects of action and concern by the powerful (in this case, men).

Partners in a Community of Faith

The task of building a complementary, holistic community of men and women in African relative to the modern age is not entirely an African affair. We live in one world which continues to undergo change with international connections. Adjustments can be made more easily if we live mindful of the global situation.

So long as the international debt crisis remains a burden on the developing countries, especially the poor nations of Africa, so long as pollution, global warming and earth impoverishment are on the increase, so long as despotic African military leaders and rival regimes continue to be armed by the Western powers and the political and new trade alliances of the post cold war era and new economic order continue as if there were no victims involved, women of the world, especially women in Africa, will continue to face threatened and shortened life spans in their survival adjustments. It has become critical, in fact, essential for us, in our North—South mission partnership, to remind ourselves that we all have one common, holistic stewardship as God's people. We women from the poor nations of Africa need constantly to remind you, our brothers and sisters in the industrialized nations of the North, to draw fresh and deeper insights as how your political, economic, social and religious p. 248 decisions, as well as actions, intentionally or unintentionally affect us in the South, especially the poor, 'nameless' and 'faceless' rural masses of women and their growing children. Very often, a well-intended decision in the industrialized North can result in greater poverty and social injustice for the women in the South. Here are three examples to make this point clearer:

1. Contraceptives are shipped to Asia and Africa and are then distributed to rural women who do not trouble to get regular check-ups, and do not understand the full implications of health hazards. This has resulted in increased incidence of cancer and maternal mortality.
2. The use of farming technology appropriate to Western agriculture instead of technology appropriate to both large and small scale farming in Africa has resulted in the marginalization of small scale women subsistence farmers. It has also led to retrenchment in large factories where women are first to be made redundant because they are less skilled in the use of machinery.
3. The IMF debt and loan conditions placed upon debtor nations through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) lead to retrenchment or wage freezes for husbands. This has invariably put heavier burdens on women, whose lot it is to put

bread on the table to feed many mouths. Being closest to their hungry children, women come under severe emotional traumas in these poor homes.

As partners in a global community of faith, we need to re-examine the changes and decisions made in our countries, to see how these affect our brethren and sisters in other countries. We must make real life physical and spiritual inter-connections with one another.

While we remind you of these issues as part of our joint stewardship, we do expect that you will also remind us in Africa continuously to rise to our own destiny, not in the western, fixated lifestyle and mind-set, but to continue in our adjustment efforts as Africans responding to changes in our own social context. Our culture abhors male-female confrontations, and we have kept this in constant view. Our adjustment challenges therefore are such that as women in transitional period, we must tread our path cautiously, seeking, through meaningful and friendly dialogue, co-existence and complementary rôles, a re-ordering of our present societies into fairer and more just structures. As a community-oriented people, we seek to continue our adjustment processes without being reactionarily confrontative or disruptive of the home stability which is already in a volatile situation. Through firm and [p. 249](#) yet peaceful means we must continue to address the issues that still adversely affect us in such a way that the emotional health of life in our communities will continue to develop positively and progressively in a wholesome direction.

CONCLUSION

Women in Africa believe that a continued process of male-female dialogue on change and adjustment issues of our times, no matter how long it might take, is the only sure process that will directly and effectively combat the issues of female poverty, marginalization, stereotyping, deprivation of social rights and general downgrading which are still endemic in our societies today.

Since change and adjustment are universal phenomena, and women's issues are also of universal concern, you need us in Africa to share our life stories, and we need you in Europe to share your own stories too. That is to say, we need each other in a newly emerging mission partnership in the community of faith through Christ, as we learn together from sharing as partners one faith, one mission of adjustment in our changing world.

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Seeing, Judging and Acting: Evangelism in Jesus' Way according to John 9

Guillermo Cook

In June 1979 I returned to Costa Rica to work with CELEP, the Latin American Evangelical Centre for Pastoral Studies, after several years of ministry in Brazil. The CELEP Board and Staff met at the Methodist Centre in Alajuela to evaluate their work and to plan for the future. I had just been named Assistant to the General Director, Orlando Costas, and he had asked me to lead one of the devotional sessions. I remember quite well the text I chose ([John 9:16](#)) 'Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided' (NIV). Just a day or two earlier, in my private devotions, I had noticed an interesting fact in a text I had read perhaps a hundred times before.

The Pharisees were divided into two groups. The group which obviously made up the majority judged the healing of the blind man from birth on the basis of their legalistic doctrine and condemned Jesus. What was probably a minority group, judging from the final outcome, judged the event on the basis of the deed itself, from its *praxis*, and refused to be rushed into making a negative verdict. Throughout history there have been two ways of evaluating the Church's actions, and of those who profess the Name of Jesus Christ. The 'top down' (or deductive) approach is to take refuge in the safety of doctrinal propositions. But working 'from the bottom up', one starts from a concrete situation and works inductively toward what may turn out to be a risky and potentially controversial conclusion. This qualitative difference in interpretation has always divided the Church, and accounts for most heresies. As a matter of fact, the division is false, because theory and practice are inseparable and should always be maintained in dynamic tension.