

New Publication Describes Impact of Violence to Women

Incidences of domestic violence, sexual assaults, harmful traditional practices, commercial sex exploitation and infections of HIV/AIDS continue to rise and ravage women in communities throughout the world.

And these situations are not limited to developing countries, as shown in the recent World Vision publication, *Violence Against Women: From Silence to Empowerment*.

The publication is a collection of papers researched and written in various World Vision offices. It chronicles the challenges, successes, problems and outcomes of violence against women, specifically in Chile, Tanzania, Rwanda, Southern Africa, the Balkans, Western Europe and Papua New Guinea.

The publication presents heart-wrenching stories and unfathomable statistics. Millions of women live the reality of a life of fear every day.

The first chapter, "Domestic violence: Aggression against women in Chile," by Paula Sáez and Alejandro Cartes includes one woman's personal story of physical and psychological abuse suffered first in the home of her father and then at the hands of her fiancé and husband.

Sekai Nzenze Shand's report on "The links between HIV/AIDS and violence: Towards a dialogue with men" includes stories of both women and men whose lives were cut short as a result of sexual behavior affected by traditional practices and beliefs in Southern Africa.

One story poignantly highlights the dilemma for women, even informed women, living within these cultures. The storyteller describes Mai Esther as a good rural woman, a respected grandmother, leader of her church, counselor and caregiver of the sick. She looked after five children orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS.

Mai Esther's daughter missed an extended family Christmas celebration because she was at home nursing her 62-year-old mother. Family members

told one another Mai Esther was too old to die from AIDS. After all, she was a public health specialist working in prisons. At her age, she would have known about AIDS and she could not die from the disease.

She was also a good farmer and a gifted singer and dancer. She remained at home, caring for the children and working in the fields, while her husband left home to work in the city.

She respected her husband and did not question his faithfulness when he came home three times a year. Within this culture, when the husband returns home and demands sex from his wife, she must submit.

Men can physically assault their wives if they do not grant the men their spousal rights. This is the way things have been done for generations within the local culture.

The village people say this cannot be changed overnight. Even HIV/AIDS cannot quickly change behavior.

On his deathbed, Mai Esther's husband told his family, "If I knew about this disease (AIDS), I would not have engaged in sex outside my marriage."

Three years after her husband died of AIDS, Mai Esther also died of AIDS.

As HIV/AIDS continues to spread throughout Southern Africa, the need to protect women and to encourage men to change their sexual behaviors is a matter of urgency.

Violence against women also is a barrier to development. Only with the active participation of women can development be sustainable.

Where women are violently abused, whole families are held back from fulfilling their potential spiritually, socially and economically.

The publication points out that women who are physically injured or traumatized have less energy to study, educate or nourish their children, carry out income-generating activities or other household and community tasks.

Korean Program Seeks to Safeguard Family

World Vision Korea recently launched its Safe Family Campaign to promote healthy and safe families in the capital city of Seoul.

In introducing the program, Oh Jaeshik, president of World Vision Korea, explained that the national economic crisis that hit the nation five years ago is impacting families in critical ways. Many low-income families are disintegrating, resulting in an increase in child neglect, separations, divorces and domestic violence.

To safeguard families from disintegration, World Vision Korea adopted 10 imperatives to help maintain a healthy society:

- Recognize the diversity within the family.

- Recognize the personality of each family member.

- Think of children and the elderly first.

- Minimize marital quarreling.

- Do not tolerate domestic violence.

- Protect the family environment

- Fight poverty and invest in children.

- Provide education in proper economic ethics.

- Promote the value of family.

- Care for all families.

As part of its national ministry to advocate for vulnerable children and adults, World Vision Korea has implemented this program in five major Korean cities.



Reflections from Bryant Myers

Will the poor always be with us?

One sometimes hears Christians, tired with the news of poverty and exploitation around the world, try to deflect the news by reminding us that Jesus said, "The poor will always be with you."

This is offered as a way to stop the conversation.

Did Jesus say this? Yes. Does it mean what it appears to mean? Not really.

So what does this troubling phrase mean?

The unforgettable woman

Jesus' statement comes in the context of a story that really has nothing to do with the poor directly. It does have to do with a woman whom Jesus said we would all remember as long as the gospel is proclaimed.

Late in Matthew's account of the life of Jesus, just before the Lord's Supper and his arrest, we are told that a woman, whose name we do not know, poured expensive perfume from a jar onto Jesus' head and worked the perfume reverently into Jesus' hair.

Jesus knew that the woman was honoring him by mimicking the preparation of the dead for burial. She understood before most of the rest of Jesus' followers that the cross is where Jesus was headed.

The disciples, full of self-righteousness, criticize this act of devotion. What a waste of money, they say. The perfume could have been sold and given to the poor.

Jesus' reply is withering: "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me."

Jesus understood the meaning of her act and considered it a wonderful gift. Perhaps we are to remember her because of her insight into the future sacrifice of Jesus and her costly sacrifice to her Lord.

It is at this point that Jesus says, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me,"

referring to Deuteronomy 15. Only he and the woman seemed to understand that Jesus would not always be with the disciples.

The mistaken activist

There is an important lesson here for Christians who do relief and development work among the poor. Too many Christian activists are ruining their health and destroying their families while justifying the zeal because of their commitment to the poor.

In the name of the poor, activist workaholics suffer from poor health and burnout, and they damage their spouses and children.

This is not a gospel stance. This is not what Jesus asks us to do. Our devotion must be directed at Jesus, not the poor themselves.

While we certainly are supposed to love our neighbor, especially our poor neighbor, we are to worship only Jesus. The woman understood this and the disciples did not.

Getting your spirituality and worship right is key to sustaining one's service to God and the poor.

The unintended poor

By now you've probably figured out that I am not comfortable with the way some Christians take this statement of Jesus out of context. I am not.

But my disappointment is deepened by the fact that a little curiosity as to where Jesus came up with this statement reveals a rich and challenging understanding about God, his people and the poor.

The section of Deuteronomy that Jesus refers to begins with a complete contradiction of the claim that the poor will always be with you. "There should be no poor among you," states the Law in Deuteronomy 15:4.

Really?

This unambiguous claim is followed by the reason why this is so. "For in the land the Lord your God is giving you

to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you."

The land that God is going to give Israel has more than enough for everyone. There are to be no poor because there will be enough.

And more than enough. "For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none." (Deut. 15:6)

There will be a surplus, a surplus that can be traded with the nations of the world.

I can believe this, because I believe that the loving, caring God, who created the world for humankind could never have intended a world of scarcity. The God whom I worship would never place humankind in a land that was unable to provide for life and life abundantly.

I can believe this before I can believe that God intended that the poor would always be with us.

But there is a condition to the promise. "He will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today." (Deut. 15:4-5)

The blessing and abundance of the Promised Land are dependent on the faithfulness of God's people to God's commands.

It is at this point that an apparent contradiction enters the text: "If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend to him whatever he needs." (Deut. 15:7-8)

How can this be? We've just been told that "there should be no poor among you," and then we are given instructions as to what to do if there is

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a poor person. Did Moses get confused? Is this a contradiction?

I don't think so.

The ones who failed

There will be poor in Israel, not because God's Promised Land failed to provide, but because human beings were not faithful to God nor to each other. There has to be provision for the poor in the Promised Land, not because God failed or intended it, but because Israel failed.

And so it is today, I suspect. It is a fact that there is enough agricultural production today to feed every human being on the planet. Yet people are dying of hunger, and children are stunted because of chronic malnutrition.

It is not that God's planet cannot provide; it is that we do not follow God's commands. We neither love God nor love our neighbors.

What Jesus really meant

So what did Jesus mean when he said, "The poor you will always have with you"? Did he mean that poverty is something we should tolerate because it is just the way things are? Was Jesus asking us to tolerate poverty?

I don't think so.

First, Jesus was making a point about worship. The only reason Jesus brought the poor into the conversation was in response to the self-righteous misreading of the devotion of a woman we are never to forget.

Second, Jesus was being ironic. By referring to the passage from Deuteronomy, Jesus was reminding the disciples that the only reason there are poor in God's abundant creation is because of human sin and self-centeredness.

The disciples did not care about the poor as much as they did about trying to make points at the expense of the woman.

"The poor you will always have with you," was a rebuke to Jesus' disciples.

The passage in Deuteronomy closes with a command. After the verse, "There will always be poor people in the land," we find this: "Therefore I command you to be openhanded

toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land." (Deut. 15:11)

I think God knew that God faced a profound contradiction. God's world is productive enough to meet the needs of all. Further, human beings created in the image of God are creative and productive enough to make it so.

Yet the sin in the human heart and the curse of a fallen creation means that God's world will not be what it was created to be.

Even though God never intended that there be any poor, he also knew that there would always be poor people as long as there are sinful people in the world.

Jesus' statement about the poor always being with us is intended to shame us, to remind us that this is a true statement only because we have failed. Jesus never intended to justify tolerance for the presence of poor people in the land.

The message for us

What can we conclude from all this?

First, Jesus was not excusing the presence of poor among us. He knew full well that his Father provides more than enough through his creation.

Jesus was reminding us, with some considerable irony, that the poor are here because we have failed to keep God's commands.

Second, the real lesson from Deuteronomy is that unrighteousness—of those who are not poor and of the poor themselves—is the cause

of poverty. At the most fundamental level, sin distorts our relationships with God, with each other and with our world.

Our relationships do not work for our well-being, and the result is poverty, racism and other expressions of injustice. Poverty was and is not part of God's intention.

Third, to tolerate poverty by excusing it in Jesus' name is an insult to our Lord who so consistently extended his affection and touch to those who were poor, sick and suffering.

It makes a mockery of Jesus' statement of his mission in Luke 4:18. God's commands in Deuteronomy regarding the response to the poor among us are clear.

Finally, our response to the poor is to be openhanded. Moreover, we are to enjoy sharing what God has given us. "Give generously to him (the poor) and do so without a grudging heart." (Deut. 15:10)

The result of this attitude of sharing is that the "Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to." Caring for the poor is good for us!

As long as we live in a fallen world, we are to be openhanded, to lend freely and to do it without grudging. If the loans are not repaid after seven years, we are to write them off. The goal is caring for our family, not running a business.

After all, if we were doing our job, there would be no poor. It's our fault, not God's.

HIV/AIDS (from page 1)

to respond to the challenge that HIV/AIDS presents, both in their own communities and in other parts of the world through preaching, adult education, local and global mission projects.

The World Vision Hope Initiative provides one significant avenue for church involvement. World Vision's child sponsorship programs are now integrating AIDS prevention and care efforts into every project. In some places we are already seeing a decrease in the number of new infections.

In partnership with World Vision

and other Christian organizations, churches can help lead the way to a better future, a future faced with courage and hope.

The problem is great, but God is greater still. He calls on us to join together to meet this challenge for our generation.

† Roberta Hestenes

To learn what World Vision is doing to combat the AIDS pandemic, visit the Web site at www.worldvision.org and click on "a generation to save." You can read about the Hope Initiative.

HIV/AIDS Crisis Calls for Godly Compassion

World Vision offers Hope Initiative for church involvement.

Beyond the headlines of war and a mysterious new disease in Asia, an unprecedented, horrific world epidemic continues to bring death and devastation to tens of millions of men, women and children across the earth.

People of faith have the resources and opportunity to make a powerful difference for good in the midst of this disaster. Some are providing inspiring examples of help and hope.

Yet Christian churches in the West have, surprisingly, been mostly unaware, uninformed and uninvolved in sharing the love of Christ among those most impacted by this deadliest disease in human history.

The Old Testament prophets, Jesus and the letter of James tell us that true religion involves caring for widows and orphans in their distress. The compassionate heart of God calls Christians to share compassion with a lost and suffering world.

The greatest maker of widows and orphans today is the disease of HIV/AIDS. When the need is so great and the Scriptures are so clear, why have most local churches been so disconnected from the HIV/AIDS crisis?

Ignorance

Most Western Christians have little or no idea of the enormity or scope of the pandemic of HIV/AIDS throughout the world. Africa is the most affected continent, but millions are also suffer-

ing in China and Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and in the Americas.

Fields lie uncultivated, schools are emptied, and businesses are abandoned as so many die. [For a fuller discussion of the numbers of people affected by this disease, see the November 2002 issue of the *MARC Newsletter*. — Ed.]

This is a catastrophic human tragedy, which can be turned around if we will care and work together.

Stigma

Because HIV/AIDS is spread primarily through sexual contact and transmission of bodily fluids, this disease comes with a stigma of shame surrounded by silence tinged with embarrassment, condemnation and fear.

In the U.S. the disease was first associated with homosexual behavior. In most of the rest of the world, it most often is spread through heterosexual activity, unsterile needles, unsafe blood transfusions and breast feeding.

These are not easy subjects to discuss, much less preach about. Even those who contract the disease through no fault of their own, such as those infected by unclean needles used for vaccinations or faithful wives infected by unfaithful husbands, experience rejection and abandonment by those who turn away without understanding or compassion.

Churches have too often been ashamed to talk about this disease or to participate in efforts at education, prevention — including fidelity and abstinence — and caregiving lest they be misunderstood as condoning behavior that is contrary to God's will.

Condemnation instead of grace

In every American church where I have talked about the horrible reality of the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, I have had someone come up to me and say something like: "Those who have this disease brought it on themselves. It's not our concern. They deserve to die."

Sometimes this sentence includes strong descriptive language, such as "perverts" or "disgusting." This betrays a deep misunderstanding of God's grace and the gospel, which is good news for sinners, which includes us.

If any one of us got what we truly deserved, we would have no hope of forgiveness, no promise of heaven. God showed his mercy and grace by sending his Son.

Christ came not for the righteous but for sinners, including those guilty of sexual sin. He showed compassion to all, including the untouchables of his day, the lepers. We follow Jesus when we reach out in love as God gives us opportunity.

It is encouraging to see that more and more congregations are beginning
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Bangladeshi volunteers meet at a World Vision office to learn more about educating their communities regarding the dangers of HIV/AIDS.