

divisive issue among us. When we are participants in the liturgy we need to promote that 'one voice of prayer' whereby our own prayer — personal and corporate — will foster *common meanings*, not only for this particular gathering and assembly, '... but for the wider contemporary church and the worship assemblies that have been shaping the christian tradition for centuries.'<sup>12</sup>

*Glory be to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to God from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Notes

1. Mary Collins, 'Principles of Feminist Liturgy' in Marjorie Proctor-Smith, Janet R. Walton, eds. *Women at Worship* (Louisville KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1993) p. 24.
2. Regis A. Duffy et al, eds. *Alternative Futures for Worship Vol. I*, General Introduction (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987) pp.19-20.
3. I summarize here the purpose and some of the principles guiding our 'Conversation':  
Our purpose is to move to more mutual understanding by
  - understanding how the issue affects people
  - understanding the key facts — weighing the costs and consequences of each idea and opinion
  - hearing with respect the perspectives of others
  - finding out what makes mutual understanding so difficult
  - working through conflicting emotions
4. Marjorie Proctor-Smith, *Women at Worship*, p. 2.
5. Janet Baxendale SC, 'Inclusive Language and the Liturgical Prayer of the Church' in *FDLC Newsletter* 20:2 (March-April, 1993) p.1.
6. Gail Ramshaw, 'Choosing Words for the Church' in *Worship Searching for Language* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press) pp.87-88.
7. *Ibid*, p.87.
8. *Ibid*, p.89.
9. *Ibid*, p.89.
10. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female' in *Theological Studies* 45 (1984) pp. 441-465; and *She Who Is, The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1992)
11. See J. Fortuna, 'Daily Eucharist, Privatization and Community' in *Liturgy in Daily Life*, *Journal of the Liturgical Conference* 7:3, pp.22,24. Here what I have done is to combine the ideas of several authors who say that to move liturgy away from its ecclesial meaning is a move towards privatization.
12. *Ibid*, pp.22-23.

## African Women Praying

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**A**N African woman's prayer permeates every aspect of her activity and shapes her approach to life. In performing her various roles, she does not set aside any particular time for praying but prays continuously in daily undertakings, in cleaning the house, cooking, buying and selling, working in the office, taking care of the sick and in all the many other things in which she engages. Certainly, she believes, and demonstrates in her activity, that prayer and living are integrated. Depending on the favour she is asking for, often petition takes priority in her prayer followed by thanksgiving. As she prays she has different personal pet names she gives to her God, names like *Echeta obe esie ike* ('the one you remember and you are full of courage').

In ordinary daily living the African woman believes God is present everywhere and in everything. For this reason she wakes up in the morning offering her life, family and whatever comes to her mind to God. The simplicity of how she deals with God is very striking and it reveals an overwhelming spontaneous relationship; for instance during the day as she does her work, often with a baby on her back, you will hear her singing choruses of praise, thanksgiving or petition and it is always interesting to notice her demonstration, sometimes with gestures of hand in supplication, of total submission to the will of God. Many a time, too, observing her well, one could not help but think of Mary, our mother, and her fiat to God's will. And bringing it more closely home, one might also

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remember Cornelia who said, 'In God alone is my heart at rest'.

African women do not have a uniform way of praying; rather, you find them being individualistic and unique in their approach to God and they show this in most of the things they do. Perhaps an illustration will make this clearer. Women in many parts of Africa go to the market early in the morning to perform certain rituals before starting the day's sales. A most common ritual one would see them perform is that of picking up their brooms, calling on their Great Provider, and saying these words as they sweep, 'I sweep away whatever may hinder my market and cause my family to starve.' Additionally, the most modern ones would use holy water to purify their sheds. Often, too, those who come late to the market would start the day by saying that the time you wake up becomes your morning as long as your *chi* (personal god) is with you, and they would go on to commend the day into God's hands by saying, 'May the goddess of the market, who knows that a mother must feed her children, bring customers to me, for it is not the first to arrive at the market that leaves first'. All these activities show their total dependence on God in everything they do.

The responsibility to live out Christ's message appeals to the African woman in a very special way and she incorporates it in her role as a wife and mother, in bringing up her children and every other child she comes across. She burns with an intensity of zeal as she strives to nurture her children in the wider society which often has very high religious values. Definitely she believes that her natural duties are given to her by God; so she glories in them and wants to do them perfectly, just like Mary and Cornelia.

Even though fulfilling her duties could be hard she prayerfully keeps going by repeating to herself that the fire put on the palm of a child by her father does not scorch her, just as Cornelia would say that even suffering is sweet. In other words, God has given her this duty and so will not allow her to be a failure. Generally women in most parts of Africa are considered to be co-creators. An Ashanti (Ghana) expression calls God a

woman above all women who cares for her children as a hen will care for her chicks'.

Sometimes one finds an African woman enlisting the help of her ancestors in her prayer, especially in a crisis moment of losing a loved one, at the death of her husband or of a child. In such situations you find her chanting dirges to her ancestors. She asks for strength to sustain herself and that the ancestors will accompany the departed child or relative on the journey to eternity. The modern woman, especially a catholic, would definitely call on saints. Meanwhile, in many other life crises, you can see the African woman pouring out a down-cast heart before God, crying as the circumstance requires but with a strong belief that her ancestors will intercede for her, and God, who cherishes and repairs, will be attentive to her pleadings.

Dancing, singing and chanting are used by the African woman in her prayer as a significant part of her approach to God. Often, both in personal and community activities you find her singing and dancing different tunes to God, tunes which sometimes take her to different kinds of spiritual ecstasy. She employs varying modes of posture such as gestures of hands, and in some parts of Africa, you find that a woman will strip herself naked in a hidden place or room, especially in lonely hours of the day, such as early hours or the peak of midnight. This is to show God the nakedness of her body and mind as well. Often you find this kind of posture in prayer when the issue at stake is one that looks as if all the windows in the woman's life are closed and she is suffocating to death and continuously oozing silent blood. So she uses this kind of prayer to present life's unfairness before God whom she strongly believes is all goodness. She can engage in this prayer until her request is granted, as the saying goes: 'An issue that has caused one so many tears does not go unsolved'.

Finally, the African woman, just like many other women in the bible and elsewhere, like Mary, our mother, and Cornelia, has always believed that the only oasis of refreshment she has is in God and, metaphorically speaking, she would wrestle with anybody that hindered her from approaching God.

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