

Living a theology that counters violence against women

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The Church of Scotland
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The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.
I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
(John 10:10)

Introduction

A few years ago, a group of women spent a weekend together at a retreat centre in a beautiful corner of Perthshire. They were all striving in different ways to survive the traumatic legacy of men's violence and abuse, seared deeply into their bodies and lives. Each one had a unique story struggling to be told – narratives of violation and exploitation; in childhood homes, in school or university, homeless and on the streets, at work and at church. Stories of being hurt and harmed, shamed and silenced, raped and demonised, by fathers and friends, husbands and classmates, men they knew and men they didn't know. Even in that safe and welcoming space, the women grappled to find voices and words to shape and give meaning to their experiences. They worked hard to become authors of their own stories, for they were complex, fractured, and had been buried deep behind other damaging stories they had learnt about themselves; stories told to them by their abusers, but often reinforced by messages absorbed at home, in the playground, the media, and not least, at church.

One woman, a member of her local Church of Scotland Guild, told the group that living with her violent husband (a lawyer and Church elder) had been like incarceration in a living tomb of fear and isolation. Having been subjected to intimate terrorism,¹ she said:

"I was so constricted, so fearful. I just lost myself really...I wanted to try harder and harder all the time to be good, to be a proper wife, to please him, to stop him hurting and humiliating me. And the more I tried, the worse it got. There was no 'I' left in the end – just a shadow fading into walls."

Fear and constraint, hurt and humiliation, loss of self. These words begin to characterise the realities of life for millions of women and girls all over the world. Different societies vary enormously in their legal and cultural frameworks; but whether in Scotland or Sri Lanka, Sweden or Somalia, gender based abuse and violence is not an occasional aberration, but the everyday context in which female human beings are born, grow up, and have to learn what it means to be a 'woman'.

Gender based violence comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. But at the heart of the Gospel, Jesus comes to us with the promise of abundant life. So here is an urgent, profound challenge for Christians, and for the Church of Scotland as it seeks faithfully to embody Christ in the world: how do we live a theology which counters violence against women? How does our theology infuse language, attitudes and structures, so that we become bold to challenge the normalised and hidden violations which have come to characterise gender relations in all kinds of contexts, including the Church? This

¹ Scholar Michael Johnson uses the phrase 'intimate terrorism' to capture the dynamics and impact of domestic abuse. His influential study, *A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence* (2008) distinguishes different uses and contexts of violence in intimate relationships. See also the recent research undertaken by Prof Rachel Pain, Durham University, *Everyday Terrorism: How Fear Works in Domestic Abuse* (2012)
<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/beacon/EverydayTerrorism.pdf>

report seeks to inform and to encourage the Church in living such a theology.² It is about finding ways of speaking and knowing God which empower, affirm and nourish fullness of life for all human beings, created as equal and precious in the image of the God of love. The report must have integrity, and it firmly locates the doing of theology as 'the people's work'. As David Ford argues that Christian wisdom is discerned "within the earshot" of the cries of God's people, "and is above all alert to the cries of Jesus. Doing justice to diverse cries is at the heart of this theological wisdom."³ In this case, the stories of women survivors of violence are the starting point, the rarely-heard voices, for how we address these questions of living a theology and gender justice.

The then Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said in 1999 that:

"Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace."⁴

The economic and social costs of violence against women in all its complex and manifold forms are enormous, but the big picture must not obscure the profoundly harmful and traumatising impacts on personal health, liberty and wellbeing. The World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches have named violence against women as sin, calling upon the global community of faith to work in partnership with others in addressing its causes and consequences.⁵ That requires of us the honesty to face up to the ways that church structures, power relations, expectations, theology and practices have been implicated in the normalising of gender injustice.

² The 2012 General Assembly instructed a group under the oversight of the Church and Society Council to prepare this report, as part of a Church-wide Action Plan to tackle violence against women.

³ David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 5

⁴ United Nations, Press Release SG/SM/6919 WOM/1113, 8 March 1999, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/1999/19990308.sgsm6919.html> Accessed 4March 2014

⁵ As declared at the WCC Harare Assembly (1998) and subsequently. All ecumenical bodies and confessional organisations have undertaken work to name and address violence against women <http://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/violence-against-women-is-sin-reformed-church-body-leader-says-1800>; http://www.wunrn.com/news/2009/11_09/11_30_09/113009_church.htm, <http://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/church-body-speaks-out-on-violence-against-women-at-un-22000>

Structure and Rationale of Report

Once, I expected the church to have answers to all my questions. But now, I think that I have answers to many of the questions the church should be asking...I think my story - OUR story, all of us who have suffered violation and abuse - is a resource for theology, and for the church.

Out of the Shadows Report, 2000⁶

Living a theology is dynamic. In his earthly ministry, Jesus engaged in theology on the road, in the midst of the crowd, with his companions and critics. Questions, parables and teaching emerged out of real situations and needs: clashes with authority, broken people yearning for healing, hungry hordes, stigmatised women and playing children.

Through encounters with Christ in their midst, ways of seeing and ways of living were transformed. Contemporary theological work in response to the complex realities of violence against women must likewise be located in the midst of those realities, attending to the stories and challenges of survivors – and actively seeking to create safe space for those who have felt silenced, ignored or judged by the dominant theological language and practices they have encountered in churches. This is not a ‘women’s issue’ but a justice issue: a fundamental concern for all of us – men, women and children – in our daily lives and relationships.

As this report will demonstrate, Christians in Scotland have been active in, and sometimes at the forefront of, initiatives and efforts to raise awareness and respond to violence against women as a fundamental matter of faith. In the past twenty years, there has also been an outpouring of profound and helpful writing from around the world to support us in our concern. Works of pastoral care, biblical scholarship, theological reflection and liturgical creativity, preaching guidance, study programmes and expertise in training and education are available – not just from our international and secular partners, but from activists, theologians and practitioners in our own midst. Our bibliography lists some of the most valuable publications and materials. In its report to the 2003 General Assembly, the Church and Nation Committee made practical recommendations for policies, education and action at local and national levels. We know that many individual ministers and congregations have supported individual women in their midst, local Women’s Aid groups and so on. Since the report of 2012, Councils and Departments in the Church of Scotland have likewise risen to the challenge to identify specific and practical responses to address and prevent violence against women.

However, there remains a long way to go. Compared to developments in wider society and our World Church the response of the Church of Scotland has been piecemeal rather than comprehensive. In the 1990s the Church of Scotland was at the forefront of this issue, we are now on the back foot. Action has been dependent more on individual concern than strategic direction; located mostly at the margins of awareness and action, rather than fully integrated into the theology, worship, policies and practice of the Church. Gender justice is central to the gospel message of abundant life, and must be at the heart of all our work and witness. As long as the continuum of violence against women prevails, as long as it remains largely hidden or

⁶ L Orr Macdonald, *Out of the Shadows: Christianity and Violence Against Women in Scotland*, project report (Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 2000)

unrecognised in our midst, and as long as the church does not counter such violence with an informed and passionate spirit, we are not being faithful to our gospel calling.

It is our intention that this report and its outcomes will contribute to communities of women and men together providing resistance and hope, enlivened by the spirit, wisdom and courage of survivors.

- **Section one** examines what we mean when we talk about violence against women and what it has to do with gender, drawing on the extensive body of evidence, research and practice.
- **Section two** locates the Church of Scotland's already stated commitment to be a partner with all who work to eliminate such violence within the context of an international political framework of understanding, legal instruments, policy and practice.
- **Section three** reflects on theological sources and resources, acknowledging that biblical interpretations, religious beliefs and practices have the potential to reinforce and legitimise inequality and violation of women (whether by intention or unwittingly) or to challenge and resist it.
- **Section four** summarises developments in the Church of Scotland, noting when and where issues relating to violence against women have been raised, to what ends, and including examples of good practice. Our continuing concern and commitment to transformative gender justice is firmly rooted in the story and mission of the Church.

Some names have been changed in this report to protect those who provided information in confidence.

Section one

What is Violence Against Women?

Violence against women is not the result of random, individual acts of misconduct, but rather is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men...Violence constitutes a continuum across the lifespan of women, from before birth to old age. It cuts across both the public and the private spheres.⁷

The Scottish Government's definition of violence against women (2009) is rooted in global agreement as enshrined in the UN Declaration to End all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1993). An extract is in the following box:

We define violence against women as actions which harm or cause suffering or indignity to women and children, where those carrying out the actions are mainly men and where women and children are predominantly the victims. The different forms of violence against women - including emotional, psychological, sexual and physical abuse, coercion and constraints - are interlinked. They have their roots in gender inequality and are therefore understood as gender-based violence...By referring to violence as 'gender based' this definition highlights the need to understand violence within the context of women's and girl's subordinate status in society. Such violence cannot be understood, therefore, in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence.

Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, within the general community or in institutions, including: domestic abuse, rape, incest and child sexual abuse
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in the public sphere
- Commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, pornography and trafficking
- Dowry related violence
- Female genital mutilation
- Forced and child marriages
- So-called Honour crimes.

Activities such as pornography, prostitution, stripping, lap dancing, pole dancing and table dancing are forms of commercial sexual exploitation. These activities have been shown to be harmful for the individual women involved and have a negative impact on the position of all women through the objectification of women's bodies. This happens irrespective of whether individual women claim success or empowerment from the activity. It is essential to separate sexual activity from exploitative sexual activity. A sexual activity becomes sexual exploitation if it breaches a person's human right to dignity, equality, respect and physical and mental wellbeing. It becomes commercial sexual exploitation when another person, or group of people, achieves financial gain or advancement through the activity.

Scottish Government, 2009⁸

⁷ Ending Violence Against Women: from Words to Action, UN Secretary General's Report 2006, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/launch/english/v.a.w-exeE-use.pdf>

⁸ 'Safer Lives, Changed Lives', Scottish Government (2009) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/02153519/0>

Violence against women (VAW) has been a reality throughout history, in every part of the world, and over the life cycle of countless millions of women, past and present. The World Health Organisation published a report in June 2013, *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women*.⁹

Headline findings include:

- 35% of all women will experience either intimate partner or non-partner violence.
- Intimate partner violence is the most common type of violence against women, affecting 30% of women worldwide. (22.7% in high income countries, which include the UK)
- 38% of female murders are committed by intimate partners

Launching this systematic meta-study of global prevalence data, WHO Director- General Dr Margaret Chan said “These findings send a powerful message that violence against women is a global health problem of epidemic proportions”, and one of the research team commented “This new data shows that violence against women is extremely common. We urgently need to invest in prevention to address the underlying causes.”¹⁰

American scholar and forensic social worker Evan Stark is the prizewinning author of *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*.¹¹ This major and influential study builds on the experiences of survivors and those who support them, as well as a substantial research literature, to argue that the key to understanding domestic abuse is not physical assault, but fear-based coercion and control, which ‘jeopardises individual liberty and autonomy as well as safety’, and is centred on ‘the micro-regulation of women’s default roles as wife, mother, homemaker and sexual partner’.

Three women from Christian backgrounds who took part in Scottish-based research illustrate this point:

- ❖ *We were very loving while getting to know one another, but after we were married, pretty early things started to go wrong, and there was some violence. He did have a very attractive personality, and there were lots of good sides to him. I had no idea that he could be capable of violence. When it first happened I was extremely shocked. I'd never seen anything like that in my life or my own family, so it was difficult and painful. The first time, we had an argument, and he started throwing me around the room, and hit me.*
- ❖ *He wrote lists of all my domestic chores, down to how I folded the towels or organised the cupboards, and went round checking obsessively when he came home. Sometimes he would take a hair from his head and leave it somewhere in the house. If it was still there when he got home, I would get hell. He really did control every aspect of my life – decided what I was doing and when; what I wore, who I talked to, whether I could spend any money.*
- ❖ *He became very jealous and suspicious because I had gone back to work and was doing well. This really upset him, he became verbally abusive, and called me every name under the sun. He followed me and kept me under constant surveillance. It was like a prison sentence. I used to feel physically sick with fear when he was near me.*¹²

⁹ <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/>

¹⁰ World Health Organisation press release, June 20 2013, http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/violence_against_women_20130620/en/

¹¹ Evan Stark, *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

¹² L Orr Macdonald, *Out of the Shadows: Christianity and Violence Against Women in Scotland*, project report, Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 2000

Stark's conclusion is that domestic abuse as coercive control is primarily a violation of human rights, rather than a crime of assault, because it results in gender-specific infringements and prevents women from freely exercising their social, economic and political agency.

Throughout much of history, and in many parts of the world, men's violence against women has not always been acknowledged, let alone named and addressed. In many, if not most instances, it has been accepted and justified as 'normal'. As a result of women's movements to develop support, services and campaigns for recognition and change, this state of affairs has been challenged and transformed in recent generations. Yet violence against women remains pervasive and prevalent, still normalised and hidden at home, work, in schools, online, in the economy, in the media, in conflict zones, and in patterns of migration. It is of vital importance that our communities and churches develop a comprehensive common definition and understanding of the phenomenon, based on evidence and research from Scotland and around the world, so that we are able to address underlying causes, and join in the urgent task of prevention.

Why focus on violence against women and not men?

Violence is clearly a major social problem, not only for women, but for boys, men and wider society, urgently requiring to be examined and addressed. However the meanings, prevalence, practice and impact for boys and men experiencing violence are significantly different to women and girls. There is a requirement to consider the context in each case. For men and boys the relationship between dominant social norms of masculinity and violence are important. These are features of our human relations and culture and they require urgent and critical scrutiny, for the wellbeing of *all* human beings. Men's experience of victimisation is shaped by those norms. All violence is not the same, and ignoring gender, which is the major risk factor, is not in the interests of anyone.¹³

Since 1999, the Scottish Parliament and Government have had an honourable cross-party record of acknowledging that VAW is a major and complex social problem, requiring co-ordinated, well-resourced and strategic action based on recognition that it is rooted in, and perpetuates, gender injustice. The Scottish Government has adopted a gender analysis because research shows that women and men use and experience violence differently.

*Men are statistically much more likely to use violence (especially severe violence) against other men and against women. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and other forms of violence committed mainly by men.*¹⁴

¹³ The Violence Reduction Unit coordinates effective anti-violence initiatives across Scotland: <http://www.actiononviolence.co.uk/>. Michael Kaufman, Canadian founder of the White Ribbon Campaign, has written extensively on men, masculinities and violence, <http://www.michaelkaufman.com/articles/>. The Scottish White Ribbon Campaign encourages men to be active in resisting violence against women, <http://www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk/>. Robert Jensen and Jackson Katz are useful sources of research, information and action: <http://www.jacksonkatz.com/>; http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/articles_gender.html Information and help available to men as victims of domestic abuse <http://www.respect.uk.net/pages/mens-advice-line.html>; <http://www.abusedmeninscotland.org/> and as offenders: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/violence-women/CaledonianSystem>

¹⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/05102715/1>

If something overwhelmingly affects one section of the population, we need to ask why and we need to do something about it. The Scottish Government must, by law, promote equality and respect. It acknowledges that steps to eradicate violence against women are essential if that obligation is to be fulfilled.

What does gender have to do with violence against women?

Gender here refers to the meanings and practices any given society attaches to the biological distinctions between male and female, and to the relations within and between male and female human beings. When a baby is born, it is usually clear from its genitals whether it is a boy or a girl - that is sex differentiation. The notion of 'pink for a girl and blue for a boy' is symptomatic of prevailing social customs and ideas about gender. Thus begins a lifelong process of coding and categorising which affects how we dress and move, what we are encouraged or expected to do. Ideas about gender-appropriate behaviour are constantly being circulated – by parents and teachers; by advertisers and the media. In life all these contribute to our gendered identities. To paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, women and men are not born, but *become* – they are made.¹⁵

The approach of the Scottish Government to this issue should be acknowledged: Gender is a basic organising principle, structuring relationships, institutions, cultures, and the distribution of resources in human societies.¹⁶ Attribution of 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics is based on norms and values which are deeply woven into the fabric of our relationships, families, communities and societies. Human beings are socialised according to the array of gendered expectations and roles, which not only help to create and maintain difference between women and men, but have also traditionally assigned unequal value, opportunity and privilege to men.

Historically, men's authority and control over women, children and other subordinates has been legitimised, presented as the 'natural order'. Religions including Christianity have played an important role in promoting this unequal state of affairs as God's intention for humankind.

Within this gender order, the value and role of women – especially as wives and mothers - has traditionally been characterised as primarily to satisfy the needs, requirements and expectations of others. The legal and economic basis for the institution of marriage and paternity, until quite recently, reflected and enforced the norms of men's authority, entitlement and even possession over women. These included the right of men to constrain and chastise their wives if they were 'insubordinate', and also their absolute legal right to sexual servicing, until the very recent legislation to recognise the possibility and crime of rape within marriage (1989 in Scotland, 1991 in England and Wales). In all social contexts of inequality, including intimate relationships, physical force (and its threat) has been a resource used to coerce or impose domination. It may not always be necessary actually to threaten or engage in violent acts, if other mechanisms of power are available and effective.

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¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her foundational feminist text *The Second Sex* (1949), "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman".

¹⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/925/0063070.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/925/0063070.pdf>

Gender arrangements are sources of pleasure, recognition and identity, but also of great injustice and harm – for both women and men¹⁸. Gender is inescapably political. Seeing violence against women in the context of gender helps to make sense of the nature and the scale of it and to understand what we need to do to stop it. In our contemporary world, the superior status, privilege and rights of men, and the circumscribed position of women, is legally enshrined in some societies (Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan are examples). In others including Scotland, the norms and regulations which for centuries institutionalised inequality have been contested with the rise of feminism and Women's Movements. Since the 1960s, the pace of change has accelerated, and discourses of gender relations based on equality, mutuality, respect and choice have challenged old patterns. But still in this globalised world, most wealth remains in the hands of men, most political power is controlled by men, and there is still a shockingly pervasive culture of disrespect and contempt of women. From vicious hard core pornography to mainstream advertising, an enormous industry profits from marketing women's bodies as commodities for consumption by men.¹⁹

The song *Blurred Lines* by Robin Thicke (and the accompanying video) is characteristic of potent and harmful notions ubiquitous in dominant popular culture - the lines are blurred between consensual sex and rape. It was a worldwide hit in 2013, topping the charts in numerous countries, including the UK. The background noise and wallpaper of our daily life sexualises women as objects, as 'good girls' and 'bad girls' – as sluts and slags and whores. As girls move through adolescence and into womanhood, they are pressured and yet judged and blamed for conforming to the profitable messages pumped out by mass media.

Criminal justice responses and media representations of violence against women (in the news and in TV drama) tend to focus on episodes and incidents of extreme cruelty and harm. This approach has the effect of distancing such acts from the structures and norms of what is considered respectable and decent in society. It constructs violence against women as something 'other': done by men who are not 'normal' to women and girls who are either 'innocent victims' or 'damaged' or who 'bring it on themselves'. We can feel anger, shock, pity that such terrible things 'happen' in a civilised society; we support the provision of services such as Women's Aid but life goes on for the rest of us, apparently secure in our normality and decency.

This analysis of violence against women as something which is extreme, episodic and deviant is at odds with what thousands of women and girls experience in their lives. For them, the possibility, threat and reality of harassment, abuse and sexual violence is the context in which they have to negotiate everyday living – it's *normal*. And the men who offend are mostly not psychopaths, 'sex beasts' or 'monsters', but *normal* - including accountants, plumbers, teachers, fellow students, clergy, High Court judges – fathers, brothers, husbands, sons.

- ❖ *Morag wanted to walk to Girls Brigade on Friday nights. At 11 years of age she felt her dad was treating her like a baby by insisting on taking her in the car. "I'm not going to allow you to walk to church in the dark by yourself. It's not safe for girls to walk alone at night", her*

¹⁸ R W Connell, *Gender* (Polity Press, 2002), p6

¹⁹ See R W Connell, *Gender* (2002) for a clear and authoritative survey by one of the leading experts in the growing field of gender studies.

father told her. "But you allowed James to walk to Boys Brigade when he was my age", Morag complained. "Yes, but your brother is a boy."

Morag is discovering that her space for action and sense of herself is compromised by the messages she is learning about what it means to be female: 'it's not safe for girls to walk alone at night'. And at this early age, she begins to feel that it's not fair. It may seem a long way from Morag not being allowed to walk to Girls' Brigade, to the woman whose story was told at the beginning of our report fading into the shadows cast by an abusive husband, or the rape and murder of a young woman on a Delhi bus in December 2012, but they are connected: and understanding the connection is the key to making sense of violence against women.

Across domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and other labels we use to categorise this phenomenon, recurring themes in women's descriptions of men's violence include the use of tactics of control, humiliation and degradation, sexualised abuse, the abdication of responsibility by the male abuser and the attribution of blame to the woman. These are found regardless of the woman's relationship to the perpetrator and whether the experience is a discrete event or recurring. Indeed, significant numbers of women experience repeated victimisation or patterns of abusive behaviour and more than one type of violence over the course of their lives. For example there is a significant correlation between working in prostitution and having experienced child sexual abuse and/or physical abuse at home (research suggests 55-90%), and up to 75% are first prostituted as minors under the age of eighteen.²⁰

Most of the women who are in Scotland's prison system have been victims of domestic abuse and other violence, and Dame Elish Angiolini, former Lord Advocate, has led calls for more appropriate and positive alternatives to custody to tackle the root causes of their offending. The Prison Reform Trust has said:

"Most of the solutions to women's offending lie outside prison walls in treatment for addictions and mental health problems, protection from domestic violence and coercive relationships, secure housing, debt management, education, skills development and employment. Community sentences enable women to take control of their lives and care for their children."²¹

The Scottish Government has committed £3 million to develop community justice centres for women.²²

Violence against women can and does have a significant impact on children and young people. This includes children and young people who are directly or indirectly harmed through domestic abuse of the non-abusing parent, usually the mother.²³

²⁰ See, for example, M Farley (ed), *Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress*, Routledge, 2003

²¹ Prison Reform Trust briefing, "Why focus on reducing women's imprisonment?", November 2013. Available at <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/why%20focus%20on%20reducing%20womens%20imprisonment%20.pdf>

²² See <http://www.cjsotland.co.uk/2013/11/commission-on-women-offenders/> for up to date information on the commission chaired by Dame Elish Angiolini, and the Scottish Government response

There is significant evidence of links between domestic abuse and emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children. A recent project undertaken by Zero Tolerance and YWCA Scotland found that youth workers across Scotland were seriously concerned about the prevalence of teen relationship abuse, including pressure or coercion into sexual activity.²⁴ Research has found that up to 1 in 2 young men and 1 in 3 young women believe that forced sex is justifiable in certain circumstances. Harassment is habitually dismissed as trivial; misogynistic comments as banter.²⁵

All forms of violence against women are under-reported and under-recorded.²⁶ The harms to women and children resulting from sexual exploitation are even harder to quantify, if they are recognised at all. Official data, therefore, while of value in telling us how much gender based violence is formally reported and recorded, are a poor indicator of the real extent of violence against women and girls.

'Nothing Happened'

Professor Liz Kelly of London Metropolitan University has been at the forefront of academic research, policy and practice in this field. She developed the concept of a **continuum** in her pioneering book, *Surviving Sexual Violence*,²⁷ based on what women and girls actually said about their lives. In a seminal article with her colleague Jill Radford, she noted that for most of the 20th century, violence against women was regarded as a rare occurrence committed by deviant men or a sign of dysfunctional families. But they found that a very different picture emerged from women's own accounts, as they were given safe space and opportunities to talk about their experiences. They noticed a recurring phrase:

*"I was kerb-crawled earlier this week. I hate this sort of thing. It happened again late in the day when I was walking home. I was in tears by the time I got home; **nothing happened**, just comments, but I was intimidated."*

*"I often get angered by men's comments and at nights. **Nothing happens**, but it's a form of terror. You can tell they know it's terror by the way they laugh and that."²⁸*

A pattern began to appear, of women describing situations and experiences from everyday life – encounters in which boys and men's comments and behaviour made them feel uncomfortable, intimidated and frightened. But because 'nothing happened' they did not define the incidents as

²³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/02153519/5>

²⁴ Information on the impact on children and young people, <http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/ImpactofdomesticabuseOnCYP.pdf>; research and action on sexual exploitation: <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/>; <http://www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk/>; SWA 'revenge porn' briefing <http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/Briefing%20stop%20revenge%20porn.pdf>

²⁵ White Ribbon Scotland press release, 'Our survey finds 1 in 4 Young People Victim Blame', 15 August 2013, http://www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk/news/our_survey_finds_1_in_4_young_people_victim_blame_634

²⁶ See the United Nations report on an Expert Group Meeting on Indicators to measure violence against women 8-10 October 2007 (http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/IndicatorsVAW/IndicatorsVAW_EGM_report.pdf), pages 8-10, 13, 18 and 23

²⁷ L Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1988)

²⁸ L Kelly and J Radford, 'Nothing really happened': the invalidation of women's experiences of sexual violence.' *Critical Social Policy* December 1990: 10

violence. They did not name or report these common experiences because they did not count as crimes. Because they did not result in bruises, broken bones or rape, *'nothing happened'*. Yet Kelly notes that most women can recall at least one incident of intimate intrusion in their lifetime, and multiple experiences are the norm for many. She made the connections between what was defined in criminal justice and public discourse as 'violence against women', and the everyday experiences of girls and women which had the cumulative impact of narrowing their autonomy, because that's 'just the way things are'. Where mundane violations are ignored and unchallenged, girls and boys learn powerful messages about what is acceptable, what is allowed, and who pays the price. These mundane violations continue to be common currency in playgrounds, universities, workplaces, places of worship, sports grounds and pubs, as well as the streets. The 'Everyday Sexism Project' website is full of stories shared by thousands.²⁹

United Nations adviser James Lang said in 2002: "Gender based violence is any form of violence used to establish, enforce or perpetuate gender inequalities and keep in place gendered orders. In other words, gender based violence is a policing mechanism."³⁰ Understanding violence against women is not just about counting up incidents, but recognising how the *context* of what happens influences meaning and consequences. Cultures and institutions which turn a blind eye to everyday sexism create conducive contexts for gender based violence. Kelly argues that what have been defined, regulated and criminalised as aberrant violence – rape, excessive physical assault of intimate partners, child sexual abuse and so on – are extremes on a broad continuum of socially sanctioned and widely accepted patterns of gender relations, which include aggression, coercive behaviour, notions of masculine entitlement and deep-rooted patriarchal norms. So, for example, there is a continuum of sexualised behaviour including sexist jokes, verbal sexual harassment, unwanted touching, non-consensual sex by compliance, pressure and coercion from known men (whether partners, dates, relatives, teachers, clients, colleagues, bosses, clergy...) and 'stranger' rape. These are widespread everyday experiences for girls and women in Scotland as elsewhere.

The idea of a continuum should not be taken to mean that there is a hierarchy of seriousness or severity based on extent of physical force or harm, but rather reflects the spectrum of complex, often interlinked experiences of violation and exploitation which are the everyday context for so many. Individual girls and women might experience single or repeated violations; similar or different forms of abuse throughout their lives, and in a range of locations. The men who commit abuse and violence may be known well, acquaintances or strangers. The same men may perpetrate different kinds of abuse. Some forms of violence span the globe (domestic abuse, rape, commercial sexual exploitation) while others have a more limited geographical or cultural-contextual range (e.g. female genital mutilation, child and forced marriage, male son preference, sexual commodification of women presented as acceptable or glamorous entertainment).

Research, policy and practice has tended to consider gender based violence in distinct 'silos', but it is vital to recognize their connections and *commonalities*. Depending on context and situation, women also have markedly different options available in terms of protection, support and services.

²⁹ <http://everydaysexism.com/>

³⁰ From address given to international conference, Berlin 2002, see <http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/presentations/men-masculinities-and-violence-james-lang>

Church – a conducive context for gender based violation and abuse?

Jane is a member of the diaconate. She says:

- ❖ *The minister I worked with used to pass comment on what I was wearing, my hair – he often made off colour jokes about women ministers and what they wore under their cassocks. He used to tell me that the best place for women in church was making the tea, and there were occasions when he definitely intruded into my personal space, so that I was made to feel distinctly uncomfortable. I used to think I'd better just keep my head down and laugh it off, because when I tried to talk about it, folk would tell me I was being over-sensitive. But his behaviour definitely had a negative impact on my confidence and ability to do my job.³¹*

Gender based violence and abuse are realities for Christians and church members. Lesley Orr's qualitative research included extended interviews with twenty-five women from the Church of Scotland and other Scottish denominations who had all experienced violence against them.³² In 2002 the Methodist Church commissioned important research including a survey which concluded that prevalence rates for domestic abuse were the same for church members as for the wider population.³³

Anne Logan's research, based on a quantitative survey and interviews with 31 women in Church of Scotland ministry, includes a consideration of relationships with male colleagues. While there is evidence of many positive experiences, these are 'far outweighed by the negative ones'. Logan's interviewees tell of hostility, harassment, patronising attitudes, double standards, isolation and gender-based bullying.³⁴

In recent decades, it has come to light that some clergy and others in the church who are in positions of power or authority, have abused that power to exploit children, young people and vulnerable adults. This happens in all denominations, as it does in other institutional contexts (including schools, residential care, sports clubs etc.). The Church of Scotland has responded to its legal and ethical obligations by establishing a safeguarding service, with policies, guidelines, training, publications and resources to support good practice at local and national levels. The service aims to ensure that the Church is 'a Safe Place for All'. This is vital and important work.³⁵

Nevertheless, churches have been slower to acknowledge or address the exploitation and abuse of *adults* (mostly women) by clergy and others with pastoral or supervisory responsibility (mostly men). Research in different locations, including the United Kingdom, attests that such exploitation is not rare, though it is usually hidden, trivialised, misnamed and rarely sanctioned.³⁶ Margaret Kennedy's important research with women who were abused by clergy shows that most sexual contact of this kind is initiated by the minister and exploits inequality, often under the guise of mutuality and pseudo-intimacy. It is often rationalised by the perpetrator as a form of superior, secret and special

³¹ Personal communication with Dr Lesley Orr

³² L Orr, *Out of the Shadows: Christianity and Violence Against Women in Scotland* (2000);

³³ L Radford and C Cappell, *Domestic Violence and the Methodist Church: The Way Forward?* (2002). The Methodist Church has continued to develop research and responses to domestic abuse.

³⁴ Anne T Logan, 'Ordained Ministry of Women in the Church of Scotland: The first forty years.' PhD thesis, University of Glasgow 2010.

³⁵ http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/safeguarding_service

³⁶ See L Orr, L Radford & C Cappell

knowledge with religious or spiritual benefits (e.g. ‘This is what God wants us to do’...‘It will help your healing’). The nature of the relationship precludes meaningful and informed or equal consent to sexualised activity, and compliance should not be mistaken for freely given consent.³⁷

Research and personal narratives show that these damaging dynamics have shaped many relationships which have been misrepresented as ‘affairs’ or moments of ‘weakness’ by clergy who have been ‘seduced’ by crazy or predatory women. Kennedy, Fortune, Poling and others have discussed the behaviour of clergy who seek out and groom people for sexual exploitation.³⁸

The United Reformed Church report *Preserving the Integrity of the Body* concludes that:

“They rarely take responsibility for their behaviour, which may be repeated from place to place and job to job, as they ‘get involved’ with women in each new situation. Even those aspects of sexualised behaviour that seem relatively innocuous or ‘only a bit of fun’ may be extremely harmful to certain people, especially those in vulnerable circumstances or who have previously suffered abuse.”³⁹

It is impossible to know in advance what the implications might be for any given person. Whether or not it is intentionally deceptive or coercive, whether it is planned or careless, it remains an abuse of power and of the role entrusted to the minister, elder, office bearer or other leader by the church.⁴⁰

³⁷ M Kennedy, ‘The Well from Which We Drink is Poisoned: Clergy Sexual Exploitation of Adult Women’, PhD thesis, London Metropolitan University, 2009

³⁸ Rev Dr Marie Fortune, founder-director of the Faith Trust Institute, has pioneered good research, policy and practice. See <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/bibliographies/clergy-sexual-abuse>. Poling’s work is also important: <http://jamesnewtonpoling.com/articles/clergy-sexual-abuse-as-abuse-of-power/>

³⁹ http://www.urc.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/docs/preserving_the_integrity_of_the_body.pdf

⁴⁰ Survivor organisation MACSAS (Ministry and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors) provides bibliography and other information resources, <http://www.macsas.org.uk/MACSAS%20Resources.html>

Section two

In partnership to prevent violence against women

*Now, more than ever, it is necessary to reiterate that women's rights are human rights, and that human rights are universal. Traditional values or religious beliefs cannot justify the acceptance of violence against women, nor can they be accepted as limitations on women's rights and freedom.*⁴¹

There is growing international agreement that violence against women constitutes one of the starkest collective challenges of the 21st century. On a global scale, violence against women impoverishes individual women, families, communities and countries, undermining national and international development goals. It drains public resources, undermines human capital, and lowers economic productivity. It undermines women's capacity to act as agents for change, and robs them of choices and control over their bodies, sexuality and lives.

Around the world, human rights organisations, development agencies, national governments and international instruments such as the European Union and the United Nations have made declarations and commitments to tackle gender inequality and violence against women in all its forms. Member states have legally binding obligations and are examined under, for example, the Convention to End all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The UN Secretary-General recently launched a Campaign: *Unite to end violence against women*. Transnational and ecumenical Christian organisations including the World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches have declared that violence against women is a sin, developing resources to encourage gender justice in all aspects of Christian relationships and church life.⁴² A rights-based approach is consistent with the previous decisions of the Church of Scotland General Assembly which, in 2013, received a report exploring the theological connections between human rights and the Christian tradition.⁴³

The Scottish Government has been recognised and commended for being at the forefront of work to tackle violence against women.⁴⁴ Since 1999, it has developed an integrated, strategic and explicitly gendered approach, informed by the expertise of organisations such as Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis and Zero Tolerance as well as key agencies including Police Scotland and the NHS. The most recent policy document, *Shared Lives, Changed Lives* (2009), provides a set of guiding principles and a series of proposals or instruments for effective partnership working. The Scottish Government is working on a new guiding document to be launched in 2014: *Scotland's Strategy to Address Violence Against Women and Girls* (VAWG), based on extensive consultation and evidence-based research. It

⁴¹ Rev Dr Isabel Phiri, Associate General Secretary, World Council of Churches speaking at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, New York, March 2013,

<http://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/church-body-speaks-out-on-violence-against-women-at-un-22000>

⁴² <http://www.engender.org.uk/our-work/european-international/cedaw/>; <http://endviolence.un.org/>

⁴³ Human rights: what does God require of us? Justice informed by Love, Church and Society Council – The Church of Scotland May 2013 available at

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/14049/Human_Rights.pdf

⁴⁴ M Coy, L Kelly and J Foord, *Map of Gaps 2: the postcode lottery of VAW services in Britain* (2009), available at http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/map_of_gaps2.pdf

will highlight the message that tackling and preventing VAW is everyone's business, and will strengthen frameworks for coordinated community responses to all forms of VAWG.⁴⁵ In recent reports to the General Assembly⁴⁶ the Church of Scotland has commended and aligned itself with these policy developments. If the Church of Scotland is to be an effective partner in this vital task, it is important that we are fully committed to the Government's operational definition which is based on the 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Over the years, there have been significant developments and achievements in legislation, policy and good practice. Shared approaches make an enormous difference – they do change lives for the better. Yet provision is patchy, and essential local services are locked in a constant struggle for funding in order to survive. Huge problems remain, including low conviction rates for all crimes of sexual and gender based violence, widespread ignorance and misunderstanding, and victim-blaming attitudes. *Shared Lives, Changed Lives* identifies some key issues, including:

- The need to develop effective means of measuring the extent of, and progress in addressing, violence against women, including better data collection
- The need to ensure that women who face additional vulnerabilities, discrimination and inequality, receive improved, targeted and appropriate support.
- The need to prioritise approaches which will *reduce and prevent* violence against women and children.

We should be proud of the committed and effective work of individuals and agencies across Scotland, led by Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis and the other women's organizations which courageously broke the silence forty years ago and have continued to break new ground in responding to violence against women. But we must be well aware that even the best support services and criminal justice measures cannot by themselves end this evil sin in our midst. Good policy development will not have the desired impact without intentional, well-resourced efforts to show repentance; to transform attitudes, beliefs and everyday behaviours. This requires a truly committed and co-ordinated range of community responses to confront the consequences and root causes of gender based violence – not just by survivors, expert agencies and practitioners, but by all of us, as men and women, and as families, friends, neighbourhoods, and churches.

Engendering Justice – Sanctions and Sanctuary

We long for a world where gender justice prevails, where gender is never the pretext for oppression, constraint or harm. This vision will not be realised in a church or a society where any kind of violence against women is justified, tolerated or normalised.

It is vital that our criminal justice system takes this seriously. It is to their credit that Police Scotland and more recently the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service have introduced important, potentially transformative developments in their policies and practices. Nevertheless, women's services, voluntary organisations and public services will always struggle to be able to provide protection, support and advocacy for all who need or want it.

⁴⁵ Information on consultation and progress of strategy from Scottish Government Equality Unit, VAW and Gender Equality Team

⁴⁶ Reports were brought to the General Assemblies of 2003, 2011, and 2012.

So where and how might victims and survivors experience any kind of justice? Where and how might they be held in safety, listened to without judgement, have their reality validated, their courage and resilience affirmed and the injustice of what happened vindicated? Where and how might they be encouraged to integrate the harmful experience of violation into a bigger story of meaning and purpose? Where and how might offenders be held to account and truly equal gender relations be modelled? What are the possibilities for connection in the present and hope in the future?

The Church of Scotland's Church and Nation Report noted that *sanctions* and *sanctuary* are key factors which are present in effective responses to domestic abuse.⁴⁷ Cross-cultural research demonstrates the truth of that across all forms of violence against women.⁴⁸ Without effective sanctions which convey the clear message that all violence against women is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, sanctuary can only be tenuous, partial, limited. Our strategies for safety and justice require both. In recent years, momentum has been building to encourage a truly comprehensive and coordinated community response to violence against women. This goes well beyond the commendable multi-agency work which is embedded to different degrees across Scotland;⁴⁹ women are most likely to turn to family and friends and other informal sources of support – at least initially. We need to recognise and value the vital role of such networks, and also of community based organisations - including churches.

By sanctions we don't necessarily mean to limit or restrict debate to thinking about punitive penal measures. For example, Safeguarding policies and procedures in the Church aim to provide a safe space for children and vulnerable adults (through training and awareness raising) whilst at the same time preventing harm by making sure the risk of harm is minimised and that people are made aware of how their attitudes, language and behaviour can affect others. This may be a good model for thinking about addressing issues of violence against women in the Church. Other denominations, including the United Reformed Church⁵⁰ and the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA)⁵¹, have codes of conduct which include addressing sexual misconduct; is this something that the Church of Scotland should also consider?

But religions are also institutions and systems of power, interacting with others in the gender order of society. As such, they can choose either to reinforce traditional dynamics of gendered power, or challenge and contribute to change. In recent years around the world, Christian churches (and other

⁴⁷ Church of Scotland Church and Nation Report 2003. Available on request from Church and Society department of the Church of Scotland.

⁴⁸ D Ayers Counts, J K Brown, J Campbell (eds) *Sanctions and Sanctuary: Cross-cultural Perspectives on Violence Towards Women* (Westview Press, 1992); see also a conference paper by Liz Kelly, "From Commonality to Difference and Back Again?: Reflections on International Efforts to Challenge Violence Against Women" (2002) at <http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/Conference%20papers/Exp-horiz/Kelly.pdf>

⁴⁹ West Lothian Council has developed DASAT (Domestic and Sexual Assault Team), an excellent model of good practice, providing integrated one-stop services.

http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/social_health/1400/dasat_adultsurvivors

⁵⁰ "United Reformed Church Policy and Procedure in Response to Alleged Incidents of Sexual Harassment and Abuse against Adults", September 2008, revised October 2008. Available on request from the United Reformed Church

⁵¹ <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/sexual-misconduct-policy/>

faith communities) have started to grapple with the destructive legacy of patriarchal styles of authority and the subordination of women.

Many people within different denominations are recognising that churches have a responsibility and a unique opportunity to contribute to a wider community response in countering violence against women. Christians have been challenged by survivors and activists to be faithful to the radical message of equality, liberation, justice, compassion and love which is at the heart of the Gospel.

If we are to be partners in challenging violence against women and supporting gender justice, our churches are called to offer

- An empowering story to live by
- A safe and welcoming community to belong to
- A promise of abundant life.

Section three

Living a theology to counter violence against women

- ❖ *The church could be a huge well of welcome and help, but we're trapped in our traditional modes of behaviour and a theology to justify it. That's not the Christianity I believe in. I think the issue should be given a higher profile, in the context of affirming dignity – not being pitied and patronised, but valued and cared about and respected as women. We could be a real sanctuary of courage and love.*⁵²

Doing theology is a continuing critical conversation involving story and text, situation and tradition, out of which we seek to discern God's living, liberating Word, embodied and enacted by the Christian community. We seek to model good practice in the structure of the report, which follows the 'pastoral cycle' of experience, analysis, theological reflection and planning for action.⁵³

At the beginning of his important book, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem*, practical theologian and counsellor James Newton Poling notes the privilege and power he has taken for granted as a white, educated and ordained man. But through his years of work with survivors of sexual violence, his own ideas and misconceptions about women and children which are deeply ingrained in dominant culture have been confronted. He writes:

"My work with issues of sexual violence has resulted in my own experiences of transformation...My perspective has been completely changed by this experience. In the interests of truth, I have learned to look at church and society imaginatively through the eyes of survivors. I am horrified by what I have seen, and these perceptions have transformed my own spiritual journey."⁵⁴

⁵² Jean, survivor of domestic and sexual abuse, a personal communication with Dr Lesley Orr.

⁵³ The pastoral cycle has been widely used in theological education, contextual bible study and other contexts. This link offers simple explanations, graphics and resources for further reading:

<http://md.glasgow.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Pastoral-Cycle-resources.pdf>

⁵⁴ J N Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (1991)

The wellspring of living theology is the affirmation that each person is created as equal and precious in the image of our loving God. It is about ways of speaking about and knowing God which empower and nourish fullness of life for all human beings. Any violation of a woman's integrity, of her body, her dignity, her autonomy, is a violation of God.⁵⁵ We are called to follow the 'golden thread' of equality and full humanity through the scriptures and history of our Judeo-Christian tradition.⁵⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye from Ghana, one of Africa's leading theologians, contends that recognising the image of God in themselves sustains women and empowers their struggle for justice:

"In the search for liberating hermeneutics, many women have claimed the biblical affirmation of our being created 'in the image of God' both for the promotion of women's self-worth and self-esteem and to protest dehumanisation by others...If one is created in the image of God, then one is expected to practice the hospitality, compassion and justice that characterise God."⁵⁷

Oduyoye notes that women have engaged in the search for liberating approaches to text interpretation. Their space and right to do so is at the heart of any living theology which counters violence against women. In the Gospels we read stories of women who suffer under illness, social exclusion, shaming and stigma. They meet or seek out Jesus. Through those encounters they discover transforming power at work in their lives; they glimpse justice as right relationship. Authorised theology has traditionally emanated from places of power, from universities and pulpits and General Assemblies. Faithful and well intentioned pronouncements they may be, but they tend to reflect the standpoint and interests of the majority of those holding office, and this in turn is assumed to be the 'norm'.

Silencing is one of the most potent strategies at the disposal of those who abuse women and children; silencing is also evident in church life and pastoral care. Dutch practical theologian Riet Bons-Storm argues that male practical theologians and ministers have usually been blind to their own gendered assumptions in pastoral work with women. Women's daily problems are rarely given voice in church, and so they find it difficult to articulate these issues, especially to authority figures in a male-centred religious institution. She writes of women's captivity in the 'narrow space of prescribed gender roles', and of being lost in a 'terrible silence.'⁵⁸

Nothing about us without us is for us

Who is authorised to speak of God's intention and purpose for God's people? The Poverty Truth Commission recognised the expertise and wisdom of people living in poverty, challenged the wealthy and powerful to involve and listen to them, and modelled a process for working together to bring about justice.⁵⁹ If we are to take the struggle for gender justice seriously in our theology and

⁵⁵ See A Gnanadason, 'We Have Spoken So Long O God: When Will We Be Heard?'

Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence against Women, *Theology and Sexuality* 13:1 (2006)

⁵⁶ See R Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* 3rd edition (1993)

⁵⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 'Spirituality of Resistance and Reconstruction', in Mananzan, Oduyoye, Tamez, Clarkson, Grey and (eds.). *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life* (1995)

⁵⁸ R Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman: Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Abingdon Press, 1996)

⁵⁹ The Poverty Truth Commission - a project of Faith in Community Scotland and supported by the Church of Scotland, <http://www.povertytruthcommission.org/>

communities, we must likewise encourage approaches to theological reflection which create space and opportunity for women to share stories of hurt and resistance; and for faith communities to listen and learn from the expertise of those affected by the continuum of violence against women. Examples of good practice are given at the end of this report.

Living a theology which counters violence against women will have the scope and capacity to respond in love to a range of needs and circumstances, and to exercise prophetic leadership for the building of a just community in church and world. It will reflect our partnership commitment to the **4 Ps** (provision, protection, prevention and participation) as outlined in the Scottish Government's strategy; it will facilitate the Church's development of effective **sanctions** and spaces of **sanctuary**. Some of the challenges for our story and community include:

- Offering appropriate theological resources and support to women whose lives are directly affected by abuse, exploitation and trauma.
- Acknowledging and critiquing interpretations and theologies which have had harmful, dangerous and life-denying impacts.
- Dismantling theologies which justify or collude with problematic notions and practices of masculinity.
- Confronting power and its abuses – both personal and institutional - as a central theme in our faith and practice, and shifting the balance of power and privilege.
- Teaching and preaching strong messages affirming the equality, dignity and rights of girls and women which actively counter the patriarchal legacy of Christian tradition.
- Drawing on the radical implications of the Gospel to challenge the social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual causes and consequences of violence against women
- Exploring and modelling alternative patterns of gender relations as true communities of women, men and children.
- Offering an imaginative range of theological reflection methods and opportunities to worship (in word, image, symbol, music, action) in ways which truly resonate and connect with women's life stories, in all their diversity.
- Accepting the right and the leadership of survivors to call the Church to account, resist harm and seek redress

In all of these challenges, our theological horizon is God's promise of justice and abundant life. We cannot journey alone towards that far horizon, and we must not abandon those whose experience of abuse and trauma makes them feel angry, isolated and alienated. We can only travel in relationship with one another, connected in compassion and solidarity, comforted and disturbed, inspired and enlivened by the Holy Spirit. With sensitivity, seeking to recognise Jesus travelling alongside us on the road, together we might develop theological and liturgical resources which disrupt rather than collude with violence.

Nothing about us without us is for us. If we have one message to share, it is that the church needs to embark on a genuinely innovative, risky and transforming project to enable all of us to become the

honoured authors and interpreters of our own lives. Such an initiative needs to be embarked upon with great ethical care.

For those who have experienced abuse, it can be particularly important to be given permission to develop and express a language of *resistance* – especially if religious words and symbols have been implicated as tools for grooming and silence. Survivors need to be affirmed as people with the right and ability to question, to feel, to define themselves and to reinterpret their narratives, when all those things have been taken from them. The gift to imagine – and begin to hope for – different ways of being, is profoundly spiritual, and must be nurtured with care. If our churches do not serve as trustworthy and enabling communities for this difficult process, where else will survivors go? Serene Jones, President of Union Theological Seminary, has written that:

“The language of faith can reach straight into the heart of the imagination. The fragmented anatomy of trauma can leave one without a world, without speech, stories, memory, community, future or a sense of self; theology’s task is to re-narrate to us what we have yet to imagine.”⁶⁰

The impacts of living with violence and its aftermath are visceral. As one of the leading theorist-practitioners in the field of post-traumatic stress puts it, the body keeps the score.⁶¹

When survivors contend, as so many do, with enduring physical pain, disturbance, deep anxiety and stress, the road to healing and wellbeing is rarely simple or straightforward, far less fully accomplished. This deeply endured reality presents challenges to traditional Christian doctrines of sin and salvation. This survivor reflects on her changing faith:

- ❖ *One day I woke up and realised that I could no longer rely on the oxygen that the sin-grace story had provided for so many years. The traditional story, about God breaking in with a saving grace which fixes things, makes everything right so that life can begin again – that was increasingly at odds with the harsh reality of being abused and struggling to bear the unbearable. I realised that that kind of salvation by the intervention of almighty God just confirmed the self-image I had internalised of someone who was utterly dirty, sinful, passive. And it also seemed to replicate something like the traumatic experience of violation and helplessness when I was abused. What helped me back to a new and more meaningful faith, was much more messy, slow and complicated. It began with a friend helping me to get in touch with my deep grief at what had been taken from me. She and others held me safely through the mourning process. They stuck with me as I learned to bear the burden. I was finding healing in the midst of everyday anguish, not from somewhere outside. They hung in through some hellish times, and I began to see God in their companionship, their compassion, their determination to help me laugh through the tears.*⁶²

German theologian Dorothee Soelle has written about the ‘silent cry’ of survivors - heard not in words but expressed in the body and ways of acting. This is their story and testimony to injustice.

⁶⁰ S Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Westminster John Know Press, 2009)

⁶¹ B van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps The Score: Memory & the Evolving Psychobiology of Post Traumatic Stress*, *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, (1994)

⁶² Personal communication with Dr Lesley Orr

She calls the Church not only to become attuned to hear the divine cry of anguished survivors, but to lend all the resources of its own imagination to the task of giving it voice. This task is both mystical and prophetic. It works to create a theological and relational environment which has the capacity to empower remembering and re-connection. And it seeks to embody a community of hope – one which imagines power differently, confesses its own vulnerability, lives a spirituality of resistance, and is claimed by God’s yearning for just relationship.⁶³

Living a theology is not an abstract exercise of intellect or piety. It is embodied and situated, emerging or wrestled out of the joy, suffering and paradox of human beings seeking God and God’s Word discerned in Scripture, and in our encounters in the world God loves. The sixteenth century reformers were engaged in living theology – often with passion and anger. Some who longed for a quiet scholarly life were thrust into political activity and the business of reshaping civic society. Others were killed in wars and revolutions. Faith and theology, then as now, were matters of life and death, inseparable from the context of people’s lives, relationships and communities.

Our starting point is that God’s desire is for all people to enjoy fullness of life, and that violence against women is contrary to the will of God. The discussions represented in this report are informed by the wisdom and experience of many people, past and present, in particular by the insights of women affected by violence, and by studies which have emerged from the engaged concern for gender justice. They raise important questions and reflect a developing and global theological enterprise which requires to be taken seriously and with a measure of urgency. We do not claim to have definitive or comprehensive ‘answers’. Rather, this is stimulation and encouragement to continue the great tradition of contextual theological engagement.

Interpreting the life of Christ

Hearing witness to the raw truth of the spectrum of violence found in stories of women’s lives, we ask what forms of theological reflection might help to bring a world such as ours and churches such as ours into a new era where violence against women is no longer experienced the world over in its “endless variety and monotonous similarity”⁶⁴?

Kevin Vanhoozer (Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois and a former member of the Church of Scotland’s Panel on Doctrine) has argued that biblical truth is properly multidimensional and that contextualised theological truth belongs to the realm of discourse:

“There may...be several normative points of view in the Bible that are all authoritative because they disclose aspects of the truth. It is therefore possible simultaneously to admit a multiplicity of perspectives and to maintain an ‘aspectival’ realism.”⁶⁵

⁶³ D Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Fortress Press, 2001)

⁶⁴ Gayle Rubin 'The Traffic in Women' in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. R Reiter, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975 p160

⁶⁵ See J. Balfour [An Evangelical Alliance Approach to Social Theology](#) in *God in Society* (edited by William Storrar and Peter Donald) (St Andrews Press: 2003)

Theology has been called 'faith's language about God'.⁶⁶ There are many ways of talking about God, many different theologies. All are fallible attempts to talk of God rooted in human experience and shaped by human language. All theological thinking, (and all expression of knowledge) is situated from a particular perspective, and (important for the basis of this report) is gendered and contextual. In the past, theological discourse has been predominately from a male perspective, but has usually been regarded as being objective knowledge from a neutral, universal point of view. In the past century, those previously voiceless and under-represented, including women, have begun to find their voices and claim their lived experiences as a starting point for theological reflection. If our churches are truly interested in the well-being and flourishing of all humankind, including women and girls presently subjected to discrimination and violence simply by virtue of their gender, then all theologies, however dearly cherished, need to be open to critical scrutiny. They can and should be called to account, judged by the fruits they bear.

“The life of Jesus Christ is at odds with the sexist theology of complementarity, the racist theology of white superiority, the clerical theology of cultic privilege, the political theology of exploitation and economic injustice, and the patriarchal theology of male dominance and control.”⁶⁷

Theologies can be either stepping stones or stumbling blocks (or given that this can be a matter of life and death, life lines or death sentences).⁶⁸ The Gospel stories about Jesus were shaped and recorded in the context of an Ancient Near East patriarchal society under Imperial occupation. They reflect the androcentric character of the times, and the disciples who belonged to the itinerant Jesus movement on the road to Jerusalem are mostly depicted as a group of named men. But Gospel accounts also convey a strong sense of these disciples failing fully to grasp the radical nature and implications of Jesus' mission. Women do feature in the Gospel – some who were among the group of disciples, and others whom Jesus encounters along the way. Martha, the woman at the well, the woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany: they are presented, in contrast with the men, as ones who have truly discerned and confessed Jesus as God's chosen one, and who are called by him to proclamation and leadership.⁶⁹

In the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, after being insulted by Jesus and his followers, she challenges him to see beyond his own prejudices and accept the radical scope of his mission, holding him accountable to the inclusive message he preaches.⁷⁰ This despised, unnamed outsider is insightful and grasps what so many others who encounter Jesus – including his own disciples - have failed to see: that God's promised community is for all people, not just the Jews. This story presents a challenge to us all because it suggests that as a result of this meeting that Jesus was enabled to see and then act differently.

⁶⁶ For example, by Peter C. Hodgson, *Constructive Christian Theology: A Revisioning* published in *Studia Theologica* 47 (1993), p. 49

⁶⁷ Catherine M LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us" in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*. ed. Catherine M LaCugna, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), pp 83-114, p99.

⁶⁸ For a comprehensive review of methods of theological reflection see Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frankie Ward (eds) *Theological Reflection Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005)

⁶⁹ Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1997)

⁷⁰ see Mark 7:25-30 and Matthew 15:21-28

In the parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge,⁷¹ we catch a glimpse of someone who, by the standards of her own society, is a vulnerable, low status victim of circumstances – someone whose right to speak in a court on her own behalf was given only because she had no male relative. Yet she takes on the representative of power and privilege, and persists until her claim is granted.

Karl Barth said: “Christology is the touchstone of all knowledge of God in the Christian sense.”⁷² As a historical person, Jesus was a Galilean Jewish man who lived a relatively short life in the first century of the Common Era, yet Christians have claimed that the meaning of his life is timeless and transcends every generation. Here was the one who broke through boundaries of race, religious legislation, cultural norms and gender constraints to usher in new life which brings abundance and fullness rather than brokenness and division. Too often, historical and contemporary traditions of interpretation and preaching have ignored, muted or spiritualised the liberating potential of Jesus’ life and ministry. Yet these and other gospel narratives can be potent resources for women in their struggles for dignity, respect and justice.

Theology of the Cross

“I went to my priest twenty years ago. I've been trying to follow his advice. The priest said I should rejoice in my sufferings because they bring me closer to Jesus. He said, ' Jesus suffered because he loved us.' He said, 'If you love Jesus accept the beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross.' I've tried but I'm not sure anymore. My husband is turning on the kids now. Tell me, is what the priest told me true?”⁷³

In the light of the emergence of women's testimony to gender violence, one area of theological thinking that has come under particular scrutiny has been theology of the cross and doctrines of atonement. What is the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth? There have been conscientious and faithful attempts throughout Christian history to answer this question with various atonement theologies.⁷⁴ For some these have appeared to validate violence and they have recently been strongly challenged by those developing contextual theologies written from the perspective of women (from different locations) and black communities.⁷⁵ Critiques have been formulated by those who have experienced marginalisation and oppression because of gender, or race. They have depicted 'classical atonement doctrines as ... models of Jesus' work that encourage women to submit passively to abuse.'⁴⁹

Such critics have challenged any understanding of atonement that 'presumes salvation or reconciliation to God that would understand the death of Jesus as an act required in order to satisfy divine justice. The sharpest challenges would eliminate ideas of atonement and redemptive suffering

⁷¹ Luke 18:1-8

⁷² Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, London: SCM Press 1966 trans. G T Thomson. p66.

⁷³ in Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*, (New York: Crossroad, 1988)

⁷⁴ for example, those theologies labelled as 'satisfaction atonement' (Anselm), 'moral theory' (Abelard) and *Christus Victor* as outlined by Gustav Aulén (1969).

⁷⁵ For an example of black theology see James H Cone *God of the Oppressed*, rev.ed. Maryknoll, N.Y. Orbis Books 1997. Feminist perspectives challenging 'classical' atonement theologies are found in Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker 'God So Loved the World' in *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*. eds. Carol J Adams and Marie M. Fortune, pp36-59 New York: Continuum, 1998 and for an example of a womanist perspective see Delores Williams *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1993.

⁴⁹ J. Denny Weaver, *The Non-Violent Atonement* (Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), p 5

entirely from Christian theology'.⁵⁰ J Denny Weaver also claims that all theologies of atonement from the earliest to the contemporary are contextual.

In response to these critical claims, others recognise the problems that such theological approaches raise, but have sought to reclaim a theology of the cross as of enduring value to all, including women.

- Some would say *chosen* self-sacrifice and *voluntary* suffering on behalf of another can be redemptive, but call for awareness of social pressures that push women in particular to self-sacrifice.⁵¹
- Some would see Jesus Christ on the cross as God who suffers with us and strengthens the resistance of those who suffer.⁵²
- Some focus on the resurrection message that evil can be overcome as a source of strength for survivors of violence.⁵³

Such writers claim that the problem is not theologies of the cross *per se* but abuse of such theology. Writers such as Elizabeth Johnson see the cross as revealing God's participation in the suffering of the world. Johnson is concerned with the practice that emerges from our theological thinking - how theology is lived out. She talks of the suffering God, who is "in solidarity with violated women",⁵⁴ encouraging resistance, calling the Christian community to action.

The question this debate raises for the church is how atonement theologies are presented and how response to violence against women in the church is handled, acknowledging that a misuse could cause deep harm. Finding salvation and meaning in the cross while advocating for justice and human flourishing are necessary parts of the church's common witness. "When we strive to move away from abusive relationships, away from passivity, away from apathy and away from the absence of feeling, that is precisely when we embody redemption."⁷⁶ Women who have experienced violence and the everyday violations which diminish their safety and selfhood need to hear that their salvation does not require them to put up with harmful and destructive suffering at the hands of others. It has to be worthwhile for them to believe in the redeeming possibility of respect, mutuality, sharing and justice.

Women created in the image of God

Another area of theological thinking that has been contentious and damaging in the past has been that which questioned women's equality as bearers of the image of God. Drawn originally from the

⁵⁰ J. Denny Weaver, *The Non-Violent Atonement*, p5.

⁵¹ See Arnfridur Gutmundsdottir, *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross and Feminist Critique*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp.143,144

⁵² See Womanist theologian, Jacquelyn Grant, "'Come to My Help, Lord, For I'm in Trouble': Womanist Jesus and the Mutual Struggle for Liberation' in Maryanne Stevens (ed), *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology*. (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004). pp 54-71, p.67

⁵³ See Arnfridur Gutmundsdottir, *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross and Feminist Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.141-142

⁵⁴ See discussion on Johnson in Arnfridur Gutmundsdottir, *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross and Feminist Critique*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010. p.117.

⁷⁶ Lucy Tatman, 'Redemption' in L Isherwood and D McEwan (eds), *An A to Z of Feminist Theology* (Sheffield Academic Press: 1996), p.199.

first creation account in Genesis (Gen 1:27) is the understanding that human beings are created equally in the image of God. However “women have been viewed by much of the Christian tradition ... as lesser bearers of the image [of God]”.⁷⁷ This has been seen in the denigration and subordination of women and past exclusion of women from positions of authority both within and outwith the church. Overcoming this completely will require the 'generation of counter images that confirm and celebrate the goodness of woman as finite creation. Such work has been done by feminists and womanists for some time now in the form of creative imaging of the goodness of female bodies, the honouring of female agents and the refusal of stereotypical attributions of maleness and femaleness.⁷⁸

Even as the church embraces a theology that affirms that God's creation is good, it needs to be clear that women are equally part of God's good creation, in what the church professes and practices. Biblical references to the femininity of divine Wisdom cannot, and should not, be overlooked, for example see Proverbs 1:20 and 3:13-18. This is “more important than any reading of the Christian tradition that supports asymmetric relations.”⁷⁹ As Fulkerson says when discussing reformed theology:

“The church is judged to diminish the *imago Dei* of women by its assimilation of various cultural constructions about what women can properly do. Gender conventions cannot be made into idols...hierarchical anthropologies contravene the reformed belief that God alone, not maleness (or any gendered or racial identity) is the grounding source of well-being for human creatures.”⁸⁰

There is more to be done in our churches to make it crystal clear that women are equally made in the image of God, through care taken in the language used for worship, through sensitive preaching, and use of the Bible, all these must affirm rather than denigrate and de-value women, body, mind and spirit.

The word of God and the Bible

The Bible is the collection of texts to which we look as a foundational source for discerning what it means to be Christian and to be faithful to God's purpose for us. There is a major difficulty in relation to countering violence against women when relying primarily on the Bible as the source for inspiration or direction. Within the pages of the Bible we find myriad stories and writings which appear to absorb or endorse violence against women as if it is justified or unremarkable.

As already noted, the Bible can be read and applied differently according to the context and status of particular readers or groups of readers. Those in positions of authority in the Churches for example, will often identify texts to support their own positions. In contrast, those without power may struggle to identify appropriate texts that address their situations, or even if they do, may struggle to interpret these texts in ways that offer liberation. This is crucial in relation to the issue of

⁷⁷ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, 'The *Imago Dei* and a Reformed Logic for Feminist/Womanist Critique', in Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serena Jones (eds), *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, (Westminster, John Knox Press, 2006) p. 96

⁷⁸ Mary McClintock Fulkerson 'The *Imago Dei* ...pp100-101

⁷⁹ Mary McClintock Fulkerson 'The *Imago Dei*...p101

⁸⁰ Mary McClintock Fulkerson 'The *Imago Dei*...pp101-102

violence against women in the Churches including the Church of Scotland. The prevalence of violence against women within the Churches as well as in wider society, demands that we pay ever greater attention to allowing, enabling and encouraging subversive readings of the biblical texts in order to challenge the kinds of normative presumptions outlined in this summary, at every possible point. This will undoubtedly have consequences that cannot be anticipated, but that have the potential to be seriously disruptive and potentially liberating in relation to established presumptions, practices, structures and hierarchies.

In the struggle for women's rights and opportunities, the Jewish and Christian scriptures, for all their rich beauty and wisdom, are at the least an ambivalent resource. The narratives are mostly driven by men's concerns and agency, and incorporate some overt and extremely violent accounts of the mistreatment, degradation and destruction of women, who are used, abused, discarded, silenced and forgotten. In this socio-cultural context, the monotheistic deity is often represented as a warrior king and a jealous divine male, and the church or people of God as faithless harlots or submissive wives. The bodies, lives, desires and sexuality of women are seen almost entirely through male lenses. To be sure, the scriptures are full of beautiful poetry and surprising reversals of power; ethical challenges and bold prophetic visions; accounts of great faith and living truth, but these are inescapably embedded in historical narratives of patriarchal gender relations. In this the scriptures are of their time. Thus the Bible can be used, and has frequently been used, as a tool against values and visions which we claim to derive from the Gospel. For slaves, for colonised peoples, for abused women, it has been used as a hammer of oppression, rather than the sacred source of good news.⁸¹

Our scriptures have been produced, translated and re-translated from one language to another and then on to another and another within the gender-specific framework which has been defined in favour of male influence and power. The texts themselves are not neutral and the cultural norms which spanned hundreds of years across various territorial boundaries have directly influenced both what is written and how they have been read. To do justice to the Bible the depth and breadth of how these scriptures have been put together need to be understood and acknowledged. The Bible apparently contradicts itself; has sections which are missing and subsequently made up; and includes stories which tell us of atrocities committed in the name of God. The wisdom required to connect this fascinating collection of scriptures to modern day living cannot be confined by literal interpretation.

There is an issue of equality and justice here which is recognised beyond the parameters of what defines the Christian community. It is not necessary to read the Bible to conclude that violence against women is wrong. But when people are encouraged and enabled to read the Bible in dialogue with their own context, their own experiences, and with an open and questioning spirit, God's liberating word still speaks with power and vitality.

Sanctuary – sacred space for living, healing, transforming community

Human beings yearn for secure and liveable space in which we can grow and flourish, developing our unique potential in environments which nurture but also allow us freedom. Space is important

⁸¹ Taken from an address by Kenyan theologian Esther Mombi at a World Council of Churches event held in Dunblane, April 2005

literally as well as symbolically – we know that confinement causes distress. Loss of liberty is loss of space for action. As we have seen, the life-space of women subject to violence abuse and exploitation is monitored and controlled, confined and denied in all kinds of ways.

We struggle with the dualistic legacy of separate spheres – old notions that men are the primary custodians and actors in public space, while women’s domain is private and domestic. Women have habitually been treated as alien and undesirable invaders of ‘male space’ in all kinds of institutions and situations where men have been encouraged to feel entitled to exclusive access – everything from politics and parliaments to football, from professions to the arts, and certainly within the ‘sacred domain’ of religion. Yet we know how profoundly important sanctuary is as a resource to counter violence against women. This too is a theological challenge, because churches of all traditions have too often separated (actually or metaphorically) the sanctuary (place of encounter with the divine), to be controlled by those considered to have ‘rightful’ power, keeping out those who are considered as profane or polluted, and restricting access to a powerful elite. Historically women were kept apart from the sanctuary, and required to offer obedience and service to those who controlled that holy space. Such a sanctuary is not fit to be a place of safety for women, for it simply mirrors and reinforces the inequity and control of those who perpetrate violence. Too often it has given refuge to the offenders, rather than those they victimise and abuse.

But at their best, church communities can provide safe and trustworthy space where victims/survivors feel secure, affirmed and supported in the midst of the pain and chaos. They are sanctuaries of solitude and companionship, where there is freedom to lament and express outrage (as the psalmist did), to give utterance to the wordless groans, to pray and be prayed for, to hear and to speak of God’s justice, and to find allies in action to bring that justice to bear in real lives.

It is of vital importance to exercise care and sensitivity in the preparation, leadership and conduct of regular worship, week by week. The choice of hymns and texts, the language and content of prayers, the voices which are heard, the people who lead – all of these aspects contribute to making churches safe and supportive environments, where realities of violence against women are acknowledged and condemned, and where the gifts of all God’s people, in all their diversity, are affirmed and celebrated. Conversely, language which is always and unthinkingly couched in male terms for the divine or for humankind; prayers which never specifically include the naming, voices and concerns of women; careless or excluding terminology; symbols and actions which might trigger traumatic memories; hymns which glorify violence and power - all of this can contribute to alienation, discomfort and anxiety. There is a wealth of material and guidance available to help worship leaders nurture the sanctuary survivors yearn for.

In this sanctuary there is truly recognition of the sacred in human bodies and spirits, and space for encounter with the presence of the divine – not just the God ‘out there’, but incarnate in the world. The Scottish Reformers’ vision of a ‘godly commonweal’ incorporated a community that takes seriously our collective social responsibility for care, compassion, education, social justice. It placed the Word in the midst of believers, and celebrated communion sitting around a common table. These qualities and characteristics remain valid for us to interpret and seek to embody in our own time and context. We conclude these reflections with words of challenge from a global community of Christian faith, and a story from a survivor of sexual abuse in the church:

- In 2010, the World Communion of Reformed Churches called upon its members to accept the responsibility of building and nurturing right, just and equal relationship among women, men and the earth, in all the contexts and spaces of our everyday lives. Recognising justice as right relationship, and violence against women as sin, the WCRC encourages reformed Christians everywhere, in communion and in partnership, to hold all our conventions and norms about the roles, places and status of women and men, under the scrutiny of God's justice.
- "Turn away from institutional dynamics that enable the distortion and abuse of power, and towards models of leadership and ministry that enable and empower, engage with and listen to the stories of suffering and trauma. It is that way that people and communities may be changed and transformed at the places of suffering and brokenness within all of us. That is the mission of the Church, and the heart of our theology."⁸²

Section four

A living tradition – developments in the Church of Scotland and the World Church

Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda

In 1558 John Knox published his famous polemic "The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women" (sic). Knox's treatise is written in the context of his opposition to Mary Queen of Scots, yet also reflects the social norms and theological outlook of the times. Arguing from his understanding of Biblical interpretation, Knox railed forcefully against women holding authority:

"For who can denie but it repugneth to nature, that the blind shal be appointed to leade and conduct such as do see? That the weake, the sicke, and impotent persones shall norishe and kepe the hole and strong, and finallie, that the foolishe, madde and phrenetike shal gouerne the discrete, and giue counsel to such as be sober of mind? And such be al women, compared vnto man in bearing of authoritie. For their sight in ciuile regiment, is but blindnes: their strength, weaknes: their counsel, foolishenes: and judgement, phrenesie, if it be rightlie considered."

446 years after Knox issued his denunciation, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland first elected a woman as its Moderator in 2004. In 2013, the Right Rev Lorna Hood (the third woman and first female parish minister to be so elected) commented "*It's only 50 years since women have been ordained within the Church of Scotland. We've moved a long way from Knox's view of seeing women leaders as being repugnant and subversive to having equal opportunities. Would Knox approve? Probably not!*"⁸³

The Kirk of the sixteenth-century Reformers was unequivocally and unapologetically patriarchal in its structures and ethos, and the formal exclusion of women from its offices and courts continued well into the 20th century. As one leading theologian commented in 1915, "our church is worked by its

⁸² Personal communication to Dr Lesley Orr

⁸³ http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news_and_events/news/2013/moderator_blows_the_trumpet_for_a_monstrous_regiment_of_women#sthash.XBWi6lh9.dpuf

male members, and that as a matter of principle.”⁸⁴ The quest for true gender justice in our community of faith, well beyond formal equality, is far from over, and the legacy of our patriarchal past continues to affect contemporary church life in many ways. In the name of Christ, hundreds of women were persecuted as witches, others were subject to intrusive surveillance and punished for not conforming to the acceptable norms of submissive female behaviour. Women were scrutinised, shamed and stigmatised – especially for sexual sins and crimes – and while church courts frowned upon extreme domestic violence, and kirk sessions often sought to provide practical support to its victims, women were frequently enjoined to obedience and patient suffering. This report has highlighted the need to wrestle with that legacy in a spirit of honest and reflective humility.

There has however been a movement in the Church of Scotland which has worked for gender justice and it has witnessed many significant developments down the centuries. Within and well beyond the offices of the church, women and men have engaged in all kinds of ministry and service – practical care and support which has shown the love of Christ to people in situations of hardship, vulnerability and oppression; friendship and spiritual sustenance in the midst of poverty and pain. In the wider socio-political context, Christian (especially Protestant) churches were key domains (and sites of contestation) for the emergence, endeavours and achievements of reforming Women’s Movements in the 19th and 20th centuries. During this period of social upheaval and transformation, women’s increasing involvement in philanthropy, home and foreign missions, moral campaigns and struggles to achieve equal rights all had a major impact on the organisation and character of the Church. These were all ways in which women worked together to express their Christian conviction and desire to make the world a better, fairer place. The foundation of women’s missionary associations from 1837, and the (then) Woman’s Guild (including the order of deaconesses) in 1887-8, created recognised frameworks for women’s work in the church – but always in ministries which were considered separate, distinctive and subordinate to the exclusively male offices and courts of the Church. But women made creative and practical use of these spaces, developing projects and programmes to address many of the health, welfare, social and economic problems faced by women – in Scotland and abroad. Foreign missionary work gave scope for women of faith and ambition to develop their own professional expertise, and some endeavoured to tackle violence and exploitation of women in different cultural contexts. So, for example, Mary Slessor developed refuges for oppressed widows and argued forcefully for women’s economic independence. Doctors and nurses in 1920s Kenya spoke out against female circumcision, and supported indigenous women who started a resistance movement (which ended up becoming the Woman’s Guild).⁸⁵

Many leading lights of the women’s suffrage movement were committed Christians. Presbyterian and other churchwomen were deeply engaged in both constitutional and militant organisations and activities.⁸⁶ Ordination of women to the ministry of word and sacrament was included in the scope of their vision of equal citizenship in Church and Nation, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

⁸⁴ Rev Dr Alexander Martin (from 1918 Principal of New College) speaking in the United Free Church General Assembly debate on the place of women in the Church’s life and work, 1915. *UFCGA Proceedings and Debates* (1915) 216

⁸⁵ L Orr Macdonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission: Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland c1830-1930* (2000); N Njoroge, *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation* (2000)

⁸⁶ Including prominent aristocrats Lady Frances Balfour and the Marchioness of Aberdeen. Dr Elsie Inglis, Frances Melville (first Scotswoman to graduate BD, 1910) and Chrystal MacMillan LLB were leaders of the movement and members of the Scottish Churches League for Women Suffrage. Eunice Murray – a lifelong

From 1914, through the 1920s and for the next fifty years, the pre and post-1929 Kirk grappled with the position and claims of women to office, demonstrating caution, hesitation, obfuscation and resistance, until finally women were admitted to eldership in 1966, and to the ministry of word and sacrament in 1968. Small denominations – the Congregational Union, and the United Free Church (continuing) – enabled the ordination of women in 1928 and 1929, and from 1928 there was a small but significant group of women who served these denominations as ministers – on occasion leaving the national Church to do so.⁸⁷

Presbyterianism has been historically concerned about authority and good order in the offices and structures of the Church, and gender as a marker of authority has been a key point of division in debates and disagreements over the years. More than forty years since legislation opened the offices of the church to women and men on equal terms, this remains a live issue for some.

- ❖ *There are parts of the country where women are still denied a place on Kirk Sessions; elders who having moved from one part of the country to another find their ordination is called into question. We talk of the great advances made since women were ordained in 1966, but in some areas that is still a huge issue. They continue to serve as best they can and in the areas where they can make a difference but the pain is real and the hurt runs deep. In such areas if it were not for the Guild, they would be quite isolated.*⁸⁸

This continued exclusion of women is relevant in the context of this report because our definition of violence against women relates to ‘deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men’. The abundant life that Christ promises cannot be enjoyed where there is a block to justice.

The ordination of women was not just a struggle experienced in the Church of Scotland; it is an issue of contention and change mirrored across mainstream Protestantism in Britain and beyond. Comparative studies and research suggest that the matter was related to wider social and cultural trends, and outcomes were not primarily as a result of theological debates. Mark Chaves argues that the key factor has been the extent to which denominations have been concerned to adopt an ethos of gender equality which has become increasingly normative in the modern secular world, thereby signalling their stance towards those norms. The formal achievement of eligibility, and entry of women into ministry, is at best a partial and problematic indicator of

member of Cardross Parish Church, was an indefatigable public speaker and eventually Scottish President for the Women’s Freedom League. In 1918 she became the first woman in Britain to stand for election to Parliament. She was also an ardent and outspoken supporter of the ordination of women. Within the ranks of the militant WSPU were numerous minister’s wives and daughters, and former missionaries, including Helen Crawford, Mary Dickie, Agnes and Elizabeth Thomson, May Grant and Dorothea Chalmers Smith – a doctor, married to the minister of Calton Parish Church, who was imprisoned for attempted arson in 1913.

⁸⁷ See L Orr Macdonald (ed) *In Good Company: Women in the Ministry* (1999); L Orr, “‘Impudent and Mannish Grown’? Women’s Ministry in the Church of Scotland”; A Logan, “‘Doing It Differently’: Forty Years of Women’s Ordained Ministry in the Church of Scotland”. Both articles in *Practical Theology* 2:1 (2009). The first woman in Scotland to be ordained and to practise all the offices of ministry was Rev Dr Olive Winchester, an American Pentecostalist who was a leader within the Holiness movement. She graduated BD from Glasgow University in 1912, and worked in the pastorate of Parkhead Pentecostal Church 1909-14 (now Parkhead Nazarene Church).

⁸⁸ Right Rev Lorna Hood, speaking at the Guild Annual Conference, September 2013

women's actual status and positioning within churches. This helps to explain the co-existence in today's Church of Scotland, of women who seem to have broken through the 'stained glass ceiling' and are providing significant leadership in a range of roles across church life, alongside evidence of continuing resistance to equality and inclusive language, segregation of roles and attitudes which lead to discrimination, trivialisation or exclusion on grounds of gender.⁸⁹

'From Cries of Anguish to Stories of Hope'⁹⁰

As a committed partner in confessional and ecumenical bodies, the Church of Scotland has officially supported many programmes and initiatives which have challenged Christian communities – in this country and around the world – to recognise and address gender justice as a fundamental gospel concern. Even before the founding 1948 Amsterdam Assembly, the World Council of Churches commissioned an international survey of the status of women in churches. In the 1970s and 1980s, a further study on the Community of Women and Men in the Church drew unprecedented local participation. The Kirk was well served by gifted women who showed leadership, imagination and courage in their contributions to this work – not only by raising the issues in Scotland, but as valued participants in many international conferences and programmes. Dr Elizabeth Hewat, Elizabeth McKerrow, Maidie Hart and Anne Hepburn, among others, deserve the recognition and gratitude of the Church for leading prophetic and sustained commitment since the mid-20th century. There were also men who were notable champions of this work in alliance with women, particularly through a series of Kirk committees concerning the Community of Women and Men in the Church (from 1976 – 94) and the Gender Attitude Project (1995-2002).⁹¹

The ecumenical decade of Churches in solidarity with women, 1988-98 was enormously significant because violence against women in churches as well as other domains was clearly named as a priority concern for Christian women in every corner of the globe. All over the world the silence was broken by woman of faith, courage and compassion.⁹² In Scotland, the Network of Ecumenical Women in Scotland (NEWS) was at the heart of this vital and prophetic witness. A NEWS working group was set up to develop strategies for action, empowerment and solidarity. These included:

- Challenging problematic theology, attitudes and church structures
- Developing helpful resources for ministry
- Offering support and practical help
- Materials for education and worship
- Undertaking research on the connections between Christianity and violence against women
- Working in partnership with others in Scotland and internationally

⁸⁹ M Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organisations* (1997)

⁹⁰ The title of a WCC Lenten study on the global struggle to end violence against women, see <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources/campaigns/women-against-violence/from-cries-of-anguish-to-stories-of-hope.html>

⁹¹ A short research report commissioned by GAP, "The Stained Glass Ceiling" was published by the Board of Practice and Procedure in 2001

⁹² *Living Letters: A Report of Visits to the Churches during the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women*, (WCC 1997) offers many accounts and stories – stones of violence and some signs of hope.

The passion, energy and commitment of Christian women to tackle these challenges is evident in the range of initiatives undertaken, supported or inspired by NEWS, and by women and men in denominational organisations:

- **16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence** – this annual global campaign has been supported and resourced by the Guild and the Church and Society Council, among others
- **VASHTI – Scottish Christian Women Against Abuse** – an ecumenical network established in 1997 ‘to offer a listening ear, a point of contact and informed support to women who have experienced men’s violence or abuse, especially in a religious context or where faith is important.’
- **The THENEW Project: Christian Education and Action to Resist Violence Against Women** – Vashti initiated and coordinated this project, supported by European Union Daphne funding. It linked eight organisations from five European countries to develop a transnational network for ideas, good practice, information and resources for education, reflection, worship and action.
- **Out of the Shadows: Christianity and Violence Against Women** – Inspired and supported by the network, Lesley Orr coordinated this pioneering action-research project at the Centre for Theology and Public Issues, Edinburgh University (1995-97)
- **Anti-Trafficking in Women** - Action included conferences, campaigns and lobbying of church and politicians, and NEWS was instrumental in getting ACTS to set up a Trafficking Task Group in the late 2000s. There have also been Guild and Church and Society Council reports to the General Assembly outlining the most recent action.
- **WCC Decade to Overcome Violence 2001 – 2010: Overcoming Violence Against Women** – At WCC 8th Assembly, Harare 1998, churches acknowledged that violence against women is a sin and offence against God. The WCC encouraged churches, networks and movements to engage in constructive efforts to overcome Violence Against Women in all its manifestations. The commitment of Scottish women to such work was recognised when Lesley Orr and Penny Stuart of the Church of Scotland, and Helen Hood (Scottish Episcopal Church) were invited to co-ordinate this global project from Edinburgh. Consultations were held in Dundee (which drew up the foundational Dundee Principles) and Dunblane. *Streams of Grace*, a dossier of good practice from around the world, was published, and Helen and Penny attended the 9th Assembly in Brazil, 2003.⁹³
- An Ecumenical Group on Domestic Abuse was set up in 2001 under the auspices of the Roman Catholic National Commission for Pastoral and Social Care, organising conferences and study days. Reaching out to other faith communities, recognising common issues and needs, and the importance of working together to tackle domestic abuse in dialogue and co-operation, the group expanded and continues its work as the **Inter- Faith Group on Domestic Abuse**.⁹⁴
- **Standing Together: Faith Communities Of Scotland Against Domestic Abuse** Scottish Women’s Aid is working with partners from faith communities in Scotland to encourage and offer resources for participation in *Together We Can Stop It* - SWA’s community-

⁹³ Streams of Grace available at <http://archived.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/women/streams-of-grace.html>

⁹⁴ <http://www.ifgoda.org.uk/>

based campaign against domestic abuse. Posters and other materials are available and the Guild is one of the supporting groups.⁹⁵

- **As partners in global mission and service**, the Church in Scotland has supported some life-saving and life-giving work for gender justice and against violence. The World Mission Council regularly highlights the work of partners in this regard.
- **Christian Aid** is likewise committed to challenging gender based violence. On a recent trip to Latin America (October 2013) Rev Dr Kathy Galloway (Head of Christian Aid Scotland), accompanied by Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, visited a number of partners engaged in this work. Scottish Christians have also been invited by a Bolivian partner to participate in 'Just Scripture' - collaborative contextual Bible study groups including one on gender equity and equality.⁹⁶

At the beginning of this report, we heard about a woman who had been forced into the shadows for years by her husband's abuse. However, her story has not ended in desolation and silence. After years of abuse, and with the support of Scottish Women's Aid, she has claimed her right to live in freedom, dignity and honesty. Her life as a survivor of one man's abuse and the social entrapment which colluded with his behaviour has not been easy, but she has claimed her space, and stopped believing in controlling, dangerous, life-denying gods and men. In her congregation she is helping to create a life-affirming community for survivors and their friends: a sanctuary of courage, of safety and refuge, where stories may be spoken and shared without fear; where there is a welcome for all; where difference is celebrated and pain confronted honestly. A sanctuary which nourishes bodies and spirits, which fosters connections and companionship, attentive to the promise and possibility of transforming justice; where touch is healing not harmful, and where grace in love is revealed. We believe in life abundant for all God's people, and this is our prayer for the church and for the world.

⁹⁵ See <http://togetherwecanstopit.org/what-faith-communities-can-do/> for information and resources

⁹⁶ More information about 'Just Scripture' from Wendy Young, Church Resources and Education Coordinator at Christian Aid Scotland