

'Women hold up half the sky': Feminist Theologians on Church and Gender in South Africa*

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'Women hold up half the sky': This title is drawn from a Japanese saying chosen as the title for the 1991 collection of essays *Women hold up half the sky. Women in the Church in Southern Africa* to express two aspirations of the book. It wants to say that a concept of God has to be re-imaged to reveal feminine aspects; furthermore it wants to draw attention to the "usually unrecorded role which women have played and continue to play in the history and struggle for justice in southern Africa".¹ The idea of the book arose when the motion for the ordination of women in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (Anglican) was rejected in 1988. Women from various churches in South Africa were invited to contribute essays, which address issues that run much deeper than the question of women's ministry in the churches. In the foreword to the book, Mamphele Ramphele demands that "the church and its patriarchal traditions [be] challenged to respond with the same vigour with which it has responded to other forms of inequalities."²

In fact, *Women hold up half the sky* was the first book published by women theologians in South Africa.³ As far as I could establish, the first academic conference in feminist theology about women in Church and society was held in Pretoria in 1984.⁴ Since then a growing number of women theologians have raised their voices and begun to develop a feminist theological vision. In this paper I present examples of their theological reflections based on some articles taken from *Women hold up half of the Sky*, but also referring to more recent publications. Whilst it is not possible to give an overview of all publications in this paper, I provide an introduction to the main issues, focusing on questions about women and the Church: *How do feminist theologians challenge the Church? What are the "hurts, hopes and longings of women"⁵ for the churches? How do they reconceptualize the Church?* As I am neither a South African nor an African woman, but a German theologian living in Switzerland, I am trying to listen carefully to my colleagues.

* This article is based on a paper delivered by the author at the graduate course: *Writing the Self and the Other – Postcoloniality and South African Writing*, 7-13 June 2001 (University of Zurich).

¹ ACKERMANN, Denise/ DRAPER, Jonathan A./ MASHININI, Emma. "Introduction": ACKERMANN, Denise/ DRAPER, Jonathan A./ MASHININI, Emma. *Women hold up Half the Sky. Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg 1991) xiii.

² RAMPHELE, Mamphele. "Foreword": ACKERMANN, Denise/ DRAPER, Jonathan A./ MASHININI, Emma. *Women hold up Half the Sky. Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg 1991) vii.

³ See ACKERMANN, Denise. "Forward from the Margins. Feminist Theologies for Life": *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997) 66.

⁴ See KING, Ursula (ed.). *Feminist Theology from the Third World. A Reader* (Maryknoll 1994) 149.

⁵ ACKERMANN/ DRAPER/ MASHININI *Women hold up Half the Sky* (1991) xiv. 130325

Gender and Liberation Theology – God, a Black Woman?

In her contribution to the collection *Roxanne Jordaan*⁶ states: "God is supposed to be a black woman. This might be so; it may not be so."⁷ Thus black feminist theology takes over the concept of God in liberation theology, namely that God is on the side of the oppressed and therefore on the side of black women, since they suffer the worst oppression. As the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) was founded in 1982, black feminist theology emerged.⁸ The Final Statement of the 1983 Black Theology Conference acknowledged that "Black Theology cannot exist as liberation movement without the participation of all theologians striving for a non-sexist, non-racial, democratic South Africa."⁹

Jordaan underlines that black feminist theologians are "not 'highly' qualified", as black women were prohibited from access to good education. But black feminist theology is preached and lived at the grassroots, in the township of Soweto.

"When white people came to South Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. But now we find that they have the land and we have the Bible."¹⁰

This is a common saying in black theology, but this situation has affected black women and men in different ways, as women have had, and still have, a greater struggle for life.¹¹ "Sexism is gender apartheid,"¹² *Thoko Mpumlwana*¹³ says, but sexism has not been dealt with by black male liberation theology. As white feminist theologians are more privileged compared to black women theologians, she demands that white women theologians listen to the fears and frustrations of black women.¹⁴ Since proponents of black theology and Kairos theology are not concerned about injustice experienced on the basis of gender, *Betty Govinden* thus calls for a "Kairos documents"¹⁵ for women.¹⁶

⁶ Roxanne Jordaan then was a Reverend Minister in the Congregational Church of Port Elizabeth. She went to Vanderbilt University in the USA to complete her doctorate, see ACKERMANN/ DRAPER/ MASHININI *Women hold up Half the Sky* (1991) 396.

⁷ JORDAAN, Roxanne/ MPUMLWANA, Toko. "Two Voices on Women's Oppression and Struggle in South Africa": King, Ursula (ed.). *Feminist Theology from the Third World. A Reader* (Maryknoll 1994) 153.

⁸ See JORDAAN, Roxanne. "The Emergence of Black Feminist Theology in South Africa": Ackermann, Denise/ Draper, Jonathan A./ Mashinini, Emma (eds.). *Women hold up Half the Sky. Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg 1991) 126.

⁹ RAMODIBE, Dorothy. "Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa": Fabella, Virginia M. M./ Oduyoye, Mercy Amba (eds.). *With Passion and Compassion. Third World Women Doing Theology. Reflections from the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* (Maryknoll [1988] 1999) 19.

¹⁰ JORDAAN/ MPUMLWANA. "Two Voices on Women's Oppression and Struggle in South Africa" (1994) 153.

¹¹ See JORDAAN/ MPUMLWANA op. cit. 155.

¹² See JORDAAN/ MPUMLWANA op. cit. 164.

¹³ *Thoko Mpumlwana* then belonged to the United Congregational Church (later Order of Ethiopia). She was a school teacher and a priest's wife, see ACKERMANN/ DRAPER/ MASHININI *Women hold up Half the Sky* (1991) 396.

¹⁴ JORDAAN/ MPUMLWANA "Two Voices on Women's Oppression and Struggle in South Africa" (1994) 164.

¹⁵ In 1985, mainly black theologians from the Johannesburg-Soweto area published the so-called Kairos Document, see *The Kairos Document, Challenge to the Church – A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Johannesburg [1985] 1986). It sparked off widespread debate both in South Africa and overseas. It is a sharp and radical critique rejecting any attempt

Concerning theology, and especially feminist theology, in present South Africa, *Denise Ackermann*¹⁷ notes that theology as a critical academic subject is in jeopardy. Universities' budgets are cut, and theology is slipping down the list of priorities. She observes two challenges to theological reflection: Firstly, she asks, since the "'free market' has become the economic metaphor for intellectual life", are "liberation theologies, including feminist theologies, a spent force?" The second challenge comes from post-modern thought, which is (in Terry Eagleton's words) "depthless, decentred, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic". She concludes: "We walk a tightrope between the legitimate concerns of post-modernity – a healthy suspicion of grand narratives and classical notions of truth, reason, identity, and objectivity – and the concerns of liberation theologies for a healed world". Against this background, Ackermann describes the situation of feminist theologies in South Africa as follows: On the one hand they are on the periphery of theological academic discourse, but on the other, they engage an audience outside the academy as interdenominational groups of women are developing a hermeneutics of reading the Bible 'for life'.¹⁸ Gender awareness has also been lacking in South African (church) history writing. An awareness of the impact of religion in historiography has also been missing.

Gender and Religion in South African Historiography

More and more autobiographical narratives by previously marginalised people have been emerging since South Africa's change to a new democracy.¹⁹ But as *Greg Cuthbertson* and *Louise Kretzschmar*²⁰ reveal, these studies do not "emphasise the role of Christianity in the construction of women's identity."²¹ There is also a lack of gender

to be balanced and is especially sharp in its criticism of what it regards as a message of cheap reconciliation. It seeks to confront churches' theologies (either justifying the present status quo with its racism, capitalism, and totalitarianism or criticising apartheid only superficially instead of engaging in an in-depth analysis of the signs of the times). The Kairos Document is critical of the way in which non-violence has been absolutized by the churches. It recognizes that the root problem is oppression – but it doesn't mention oppression against women at all.

¹⁶ GOVINDEN, Betty. "No Time for Silence. Women, Church, and Liberation in Southern Africa": Ackermann, Denise/ Draper, Jonathan A./ Mashinini, Emma (eds.). *Women hold up Half the Sky. Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg 1991) 290.

¹⁷ Denise Ackermann then was a Member of the Anglican Church and teaching practical theology at the Faculty of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape, see ACKERMANN, Denise. "'A Voice was heard in Ramah'. A Feminist Theology of Praxis for Healing in South Africa": Ackermann, Denise/ Bons-Storm, Riet (eds). *Liberating Faith Practices. Feminist Practical Theologies in Context* (Leuven 1998) 75–102, 78 and ACKERMANN, Denise. "Becoming Fully Human. An Ethic of Relationship in Difference and Otherness": *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 102 (1998) 13–28, 13.

¹⁸ See ACKERMANN "Forward from the Margins" (1997) 63–66. See the example of the 'Umtata Women's Theology Group' who is producing Bible Study booklets for women to use: ISAAC, Jean/ KRETZSCHMAR, Louise /PIGOTT, Margie/ THELIN, Nelda. "A Case Study. The Umtata Women's Theology Group": Ackermann, Denise/ Draper, Jonathan A./ Mashinini, Emma (eds.). *Women hold up Half the Sky. Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg 1991) 64–75.

¹⁹ See CUTHBERTSON, Greg/ KRETZSCHMAR, Louise. "Gender and Mission Christianity. Recent Trends in South African Historiography and Theology": *Voices from the Third World* 1 (1997) 78.

²⁰ Louise Kretzschmar then taught at the Department of Systematic Theology and Theological Ethics at Unisa, Pretoria, see ACKERMANN/ DRAPER/ MASHININI *Women hold up Half the Sky* (1991) 396.

²¹ CUTHBERTSON/ KRETZSCHMAR "Gender and Mission Christianity." (1997) 83. Only four articles combine gender and religion, see op. cit. 84.

as analytic category. Both South African history and ecclesiastical history texts are androcentric. You may find chapters about witches and sorcerers, but not on women and gender. However, religion and gender research is becoming more prominent, as cultural studies and post-modernism give new definitions to what "history" means. Recent research on women in Africa concentrates on the "imposition of Western patriarchy through church practice."²² Some of them conclude that African women experienced Christianity as empowering, arguing that Christianity introduced new conceptions of gender to indigenous women. One study for example shows that mission stations were "refuges for women anxious to avoid tribal marriages, and for freed and escaped slaves at the Cape."²³

But I also found a contribution, which gives the opposite. *Angelene Swart*²⁴ tells the story of a woman in the 18th century as a case in point. Her name was Vehettge Tikkuie and her story highlights the conflict between her indigenous religion and the pietistic Christian faith the German missionary Georg Schmidt taught her.²⁵ Vehettge was the first woman to be baptised, but was never asked to help the missionary. When he had to leave the country, he left responsibility for the mission with two men. Only as they disappeared did Vehettge step in and was a missionary amongst her own people for fifty years. She even had female students who were able to read from the New Testament. Then new missionaries came and took over and Vehettge died a few days before the new church was inaugurated. Schmidt doesn't mention her very often in his diary, but blames her for disobedience and headstrong behaviour. Though Vehettge was the first female missionary, the Moravian Church never credited her for her contribution. Angelene Swart takes this case study in order to ask about "the dignity and the worth of women in the commonwealth of God."²⁶

The Church – Gendered Ministry

With the ordination for women still being refused in some churches, complaints about the inequality between women and men in the church remain a central topic in South African women theologians' writings.²⁷ Two statements seem representative. *Dorothy Ramodibe*²⁸ asks if it is really possible for women and men to build the church together:

²² See CUTHBERTSON/ KRETZSCHMAR op.cit. 89.

²³ See CUTHBERTSON/ KRETZSCHMAR op. cit. 86–90.

²⁴ Angelene Swart then was a member of the Moravian Church of South Africa and a Lecturer and Principal of the Moravian Seminary, see KANYORO, Musimbi/ NJOROGE, Nyambura J. (eds.). *Groaning in Faith. African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi 1996) ix.

²⁵ See SWART, Angelene. "Dignity and Worth in the Commonwealth of God": Kanyoro, Musimbi R. A./ Njoroge, Nyambura J. (eds.). *Groaning in Faith. African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi 1996) 53–63.

²⁶ SWART "Dignity and Worth in the Commonwealth of God" (1996) 6.

²⁷ See ACKERMANN/ DRAPER/ MASHININI *Women hold up Half the Sky. Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (1991).

²⁸ Dorothy Ramodibe then was a Roman Catholic laywoman and administrative secretary of the Institute of Contextual Theology in Braamfontein, see FABELLA, Virginia M. M./ ODUYOYE, Mercy Amba (eds.). *With Passion and Compassion.* (1999) 191.

"This sounds like the same apartheid drums that I hear at home, where people (particularly P. W. Botha) call upon whites and blacks to build together the 'nation' of South Africa while apartheid remains intact."²⁹

She states that "the true measure of liberation in any society is the extent to which women are liberated"³⁰. Women's status in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (in 1996) is summarised by *Sharon Potgieter*³¹ as follows:

"Women, who have formed the backbone of the Church in South Africa and who comprise more than 70 per cent of the Church population, are usually absent from its decision-making bodies and hierarchies."³²

She herself had felt a strong desire towards full-time Church ministry, but as women are still refused ordination, she totally withdrew from her church.³³ Taking into account Dorothy Ramodibe's opinion that building a new church and a new society in South Africa are only possible if women are fully involved³⁴, I want to look at some examples of building society and church together with women in present day South Africa.

Building a New Society in South Africa – Gendered Violence, Empowerment of Women, Healing Church

Three examples of building society and church on the basis of a Gendered perspective shall be given. *Annalet van Schalkwyk*³⁵ investigates *Gendered violence* under apartheid and compares it to the Old Testament concept of "shalom" describing a vision of peace, justice and well-being between individuals, within the society, between people and God, and between human beings and nature. "Shalom" means *reconciliation and the healing of broken relationships*³⁶. Schalkwyk wants both Christian and non-Christian agencies to include the healing and restitution of women who have suffered and are still suffering violence.³⁷ She wants these women themselves to be "agents of mission who contribute towards their own healing and that of their communities."³⁸ First women are "mission agents in the creation of Gendered truth."³⁹ As

²⁹ RAMODIBE, Dorothy. "Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa" (1999), 14.

³⁰ RAMODIBE op. cit. 19.

³¹ Sharon Potgieter then had withdrawn from the Anglican Church. She is a Masters graduate in Theology at University of Western Cape and worked as a schoolteacher, see POTGIETER, Sharon. "Church Praxis and Women who Remain Within the Church. My Quest and the Ensuing Journey Toward Priesthood": Kanyoro, Musimbi R. A./ Njoroge, Nyambura J. (eds). *Groaning in Faith. African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi 1996) 16–22.

³² POTGIETER, Sharon. "Church Praxis and Women who Remain Within the Church." (Nairobi 1996) 16.

³³ See op. cit. 9–20.

³⁴ See RAMODIBE "Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa" (1999) 20–21.

³⁵ Annalet van Schalkwyk is a missiologist from South Africa.

³⁶ See Van SCHALKWYK, Annalet. "A Gendered Truth. Women's Testimonies at the TRC and Reconciliation": *Voices from the Third World 2* (2000) 9–42.

³⁷ See also my reflections about gendered violence and HIV/AIDS in transforming South Africa in my article "Südafrika heute – Geschlechterverhältnisse im Wandel?" in this book. There I also mention Isabel Apawo Phiri's case study of domestic violence in Christian homes.

³⁸ SCHALKWYK "A Gendered Truth" (2000) 13f.

³⁹ SCHALKWYK op. cit. 31.

Antje Krog writes: "Truth has become Woman."⁴⁰ In missiological terms women are taking part in creating a "*shalomatic* society". Secondly, women are "mission agents in the protest movement against Gendered violence."⁴¹ Using narratives and metaphors, women in the TRC process were telling their own stories, but also the stories of the audience. There is also an interaction between women who testified and those who kept silent, as they share their experiences. Thus women create a movement of protest. Lastly, women are "mission agents in the healing of themselves and their communities."⁴²

What is the task of the churches? Schalkwyk suggests that religious communities must listen carefully to women's testimonies at the TRC. Religious communities have to reflect their meaning for a shalomatic understanding of religion and mission. She wants religious communities to take the movement of protest forward and to make people aware of gendered violence and to provide pastoral, medical and economic support for women as victims.⁴³

Schalkwyk points out that the bill constituting the TRC limited its brief to gross human rights violations (killings, abductions, torture, and severe ill treatment), with gendered violence not specifically included in this definition. However women from the NGO sector were lobbying to give attention to the question of gender. As a result special Women's Hearings were held, but not many female survivors of violence were able to come before the TRC. The media coverage was limited, as violence against women is not concerned to be sensational, as Schalkwyk points out. If you look at the way women pictured themselves, you can see that women testified primarily about violations against their sons, husbands and brothers, while men testified about their own experiences. It was only in the Women's Hearings that women came out with their own experience.⁴⁴ However, women's stories of others – sons, husbands etc – contain "hidden texts"⁴⁵, as women often spoke of hidden aspects of their daily life under apartheid. Since thousands of women could not tell their stories to the TRC, women's stories are also "texts of silence".⁴⁶ They express the fact that some horrors cannot be articulated – and this silence is gendered. The Women's Hearings gave women a space to tell their stories. Their testimonies were "cries of protest against abuse"⁴⁷ and they spoke for many other women who were hindered to speak.

To give an example: Sheila is a woman who gave testimony before the TRC. She describes that apartheid human rights violations affected all areas of the lives of individuals and families and that there were gendered roles, as wives and daughters of political activists were placed in the ambit of the home (whilst sons were free to leave the house).

⁴⁰ KROG, Antjie. *Country of my Skull* (Johannesburg 1998) 56.

⁴¹ SCHALKWYK op. cit. 33.

⁴² SCHALKWYK op. cit. 34.

⁴³ See SCHALKWYK op. cit. 32–35.

⁴⁴ See SCHALKWYK op. cit. 16–19.

⁴⁵ SCHALKWYK op. cit. 20.

⁴⁶ SCHALKWYK op. cit. 22.

⁴⁷ SCHALKWYK op. cit. 25.

She also gave testimony how her faith and the counselling of her church community helped her to survive and to find healing for the broken relationship between her and her mother – caused by apartheid persecution.⁴⁸

In the Final Report of the TRC a gendered perspective is only included in the chapter about Women's Hearings (chapter 10), but it is missing in the rest of the report. Even in the Faith Community Hearings (chapter 3) gendered violence is not reported.⁴⁹ In a last-minute action, the Faith Community Hearings asked the South African Council of Churches to arrange with the Women's Ecumenical Group to make a submission. Here it came out that the patriarchal nature of churches enforces the subjugation of women to men and leads to the abuse of women by men. But this submission was totally ignored by the writers of the Final Report on the Faith Hearings.⁵⁰

In consequence, Schalkwyk calls for the building of a "culture of Gendered human rights and reconciliation."⁵¹ She addresses the Christian and wider religious community in South Africa to take forward this culture. To build up an inclusive understanding of justice and reconciliation, women's stories of gendered violence must be told and retold and listened to.⁵²

The second example of the building of a new South Africa is the *empowerment of women*. In the context of disempowerment of the majority of the people in South Africa on the basis of race, class and gender, *Isabel Apawo Phiri*⁵³ wants to show how The Centre for Constructive Theology (CCT) makes a contribution towards the empowerment of women. The CCT, an initiative of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Durban-Westville (Durban, KwaZulu-Natal) was established 1996 and is funded by various South African churches and from abroad.⁵⁴ The CCT aims to contribute to transformation and reconstruction in South Africa and is open to dialogue with other faith communities. It seeks to build bridges between theological enquiry and the practical needs of communities and seeks to give contextually relevant theological responses to problems the society is facing at the moment. Co-ordinating the CCT programme on 'Women in the Church and Society' Phiri is working with ecumenical groups and particular denominations. She borrows Betty Govinden's saying:

"Opening up spaces for dialogue is empowering in itself; women are empowered as they name their world and themselves, tell their own stories, express their anger and hurt, and grapple with their thoughts and understandings."⁵⁵

⁴⁸ See op. cit. 25–30.

⁴⁹ See op. cit. 36–37.

⁵⁰ See op. cit. 18.

⁵¹ Op. cit. 37.

⁵² See op. cit. 39.

⁵³ Phiri calls herself a "professional lay woman growing up in the Presbyterian and Pentecostal urban area". She is the co-ordinator of the CCT programme "Women in the Church and Society", see PHIRI, Isabel Apawo. "Empowerment of Women Through the Centre for Constructive Theology": *International Review of Mission* 354 (2000) 329.

⁵⁴ It is housed in the 'Centre for Religious Studies' and belongs to the Faculty of Humanities, see PHIRI "Empowerment of Women Through the Centre for Constructive Theology" (2000) 330.

⁵⁵ SCHALKWYK "A Gendered Truth" (2000) 330.

Thus the empowerment of women takes place on several levels⁵⁶: Empowerment means providing a forum for exchange between the very few women theologians and female clergy within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and especially within its South African branch. Telling the story of one's own experience and those of other women is one methodology of the Circle. Women theologians are also encouraged to write. Empowerment also means theological reflection and Bible studies with grassroot women; e.g. wives of clergymen and laywomen. Empowerment includes research projects, e.g. about domestic violence in Christian homes. The silence of the church which failed to address the problem from the pulpit, was one reason for this research project. Empowerment through the dissemination of information (books, manuals etc.), through scholarships for women students, especially indigenous African women, was another. Finally, women's studies should be included in curricula to bring awareness about African women's theology.

My third example is Denise Ackermann's idea that feminist theology of praxis has to contribute to the healing of her country, the social and political healing, the healing of apartheid victims and the perpetrators' healing from apartheid ideologies and especially the healing of women and children.⁵⁷ Thus, she wants the church to become a healing church. She has little faith in the ability of the institutional church, but in small groups within the church.⁵⁸ There are three most important aspects within the concept of a healing church⁵⁹: First, "communal lament" where remorse, anger, the need for accountability and justice are cried out. It is a spiritual and political act, which has disappeared within Western churches. The second and third aspects are "to wait in faith" and "to place the tears and the acts of love in the communion cup." In times of apartheid the Eucharist had been a symbol for sexism (as churches do not allow women to be ordained and to serve the sacraments) and separation, because of racism. As rituals have to do with relationships, sharing one cup in the Eucharist is an affirmation of the healing process. Ackermann notes that an emancipatory use of the motif of sacrifice in the Eucharist must be conscious of the demand for the sacrifice of unjust power (for example white women's privileges) and the complexity of interlocking oppressions.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See SCHALKWYK op. cit. 331–337.

⁵⁷ See ACKERMANN "'A Voice was heard in Ramah'" (1998) 80–82.

⁵⁸ See ACKERMANN op. cit. 94.

⁵⁹ See for the three aspects ACKERMANN op. cit. 96–100.

⁶⁰ The relationship between *African Traditional Religion and Christianity* is also a main issue in South African women theologians' writings – especially the aspect of female healers –, but as it is not possible to talk about it intensively in this paper, I leave it out. For further information see MNENDE, Nokuzola. "Ancestors and Healing in African Traditional Religion": Kanyoro, Musimbi R. A./ Njoroge, Nyambura J. (eds.). *Groaning in Faith. African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi 1996) 242–252 and MAPHUTI MAJAPIE MADIBA, Daphne. "Women in African Traditional Religions": Kanyoro, Musimbi R. A./ Njoroge, Nyambura J. (eds.). *Groaning in Faith. African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi 1996) 270–282.

An Ethic of Relationships in Difference and Otherness?

The year 1857, *Denise Ackermann* points out, is significant in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church, because it was then that race proved to be stronger than religion. The synod decided no longer to administer the Holy Communion without distinction of colour or origin.⁶¹ Therefore she calls for "*an ethic of relationship in difference and otherness*"⁶² and looks for the practical implications of such an ethic. In fact, speaking of the other means speaking of the nature of the Church, made up of diverse peoples, traditions, histories, cultures and languages, challenged to unity in Jesus Christ – not forgetting that Christianity itself is one of many religions in the world. Ackermann's ethic takes over a saying from traditional African philosophy, saying namely that "A person is a person through other persons." This idea is called "ubuntu" in South Africa and it is not foreign to European thought. Yet, this ethic is based on the concept of mutuality as reciprocal interdependence of equals. Theologically it is based on the concept of a triune God, as the three persons of God – Father, Son and Spirit – are related to each other and God, in turn, is also related to human beings.⁶³ To put the ethic of relationship in practice means *confession and repentance* of what one has done to the other; secondly *epiphanies* are needed. An epiphany is a strong moment of astonishment, which causes radical change. The third moment is a new *look* into the face of the other, as the other is the mirror of myself and I am the mirror of her or him. The fourth step is to *hear* the story of the other, as our stories reveal the differences amongst us. Lastly, an *ongoing conversation* is needed.⁶⁴

Final Remarks

In closing, I want to note some observations and ambivalences which came up during my work on this paper. I observed that black feminist theologians' writings are much closer to writings from theologians from other African countries, whilst white feminist theologians writings mostly pick up themes which are also discussed in Anglo-European contexts, e.g. postmodernism. The question about the imposition of Western patriarchies cannot be responded to in a monolithic way, as it has different forms. I suppose one must have a closer look at who is conducting the research and the context of the case to be studied. The problem of gender and ministry in the churches is still at stake today, but one should also know that not all the problems of gender and church are solved if women have the possibility of getting ordained. I placed the three examples of 'gendered building' of a new society and Church in South Africa at the centre of this enquiry hoping that we shall see the results in some years. Ackermann's ethic of relationship in difference and otherness shows that changes of people's mind cannot only

⁶¹ See ACKERMANN, "Becoming Fully Human. (1998) 13.

⁶² ACKERMANN *op. cit.* 14.

⁶³ See ACKERMANN *op. cit.* 16–20.

⁶⁴ See ACKERMANN *op. cit.* 22–26.

be "made", but are also a gift, revealing spiritual aspects of life. Changes are needed today and in the future to reveal that women hold up half the sky.

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