

Preparing for Lambeth 2020

# LISTENING TOGETHER

Global Anglican Perspectives on the  
Renewal of Prayer and the Religious Life

Edited by  
MUTHURAJ SWAMY  
and  
STEPHEN SPENCER



# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>List of contributors</i>	xi

Introduction	1
<i>Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury</i>	

## *Section 1*

### THE RENEWAL OF PRAYER IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

1 Pray Pray Pray! Women and the Prayer of Persistence and Resistance	15
<i>Esther Mombo (Kenya) with a response by Isabelle Hamley (United Kingdom)</i>	
2 Renewal through Blending Old and New	29
<i>Joseph Galgalo (Kenya) with a response by Sarah Cawdell (United Kingdom)</i>	
3 The Renewal of Prayer in Adversity	43
<i>Anthony Poggo (South Sudan)</i>	
4 A Forgiving Prayer of the Martyr	51
<i>Naw Myatt Hsu Mon (Myanmar)</i>	

## *Section 2*

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

5 Foundations of Anglican Spirituality	63
<i>Shady Anis (Egypt) with a response by Regina Kinuthia (Kenya)</i>	
6 Inspiration from the Rule of St Benedict	72
<i>Paulo Cesar Ueti Barasioli (Brazil) with a response by Muthuraj Swamy (India)</i>	

Contents

- 7 Learning from the Lord's Prayer 88  
*Muthuraj Swamy (India)*

**Section 3**

**THE RENEWAL OF MONASTIC COMMUNITIES**

- 8 Prayer and the Renewal of the Religious Life in Cameroon 99  
*Emmanuel Oba'a (Cameroon) with a response by George Guiver (United Kingdom)*
- 9 My Life as a Franciscan Sister in Korea 114  
*Jemma M. Park (South Korea) with a response by Lydia Mwaniki (Kenya)*
- 10 The Foundation of Prayer at the Heart of Melanesian Religious Life 128  
*Nelson Bako (Solomon Islands) with a response by Graham Kings (United Kingdom)*
- 11 Sisters of the Church in the Solomon Islands 143  
*Veronica Vasaethe (Solomon Islands) with a response by Stephen Spencer (United Kingdom)*
- 12 Franciscan Communities at Prayer 160  
*Christopher John Masters (New Zealand) with a response by Kabiro wa Gatumu (Kenya)*

**Section 4**

**INNOVATION IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE**

- 13 Prayer and Community Life in the Chemin Neuf Community 185  
*Estelle M. Sogbou (Côte d'Ivoire and France) with a response by Robinson Mwangi (Kenya)*
- 14 Renewal in the Community of St Anselm 198  
*Tonderai Muzhinji (Zimbabwe)*

*Contents*

15 Dispersed Communities: Third Order, Society of St Francis, and the CMS <i>Sarah Cawdell (United Kingdom)</i>	205
Conclusion: Creativity and Continuity <i>Stephen Spencer (Anglican Communion Office, London)</i>	213
<i>Index</i>	220

## Section 1

# THE RENEWAL OF PRAYER IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

# 1

## Pray Pray Pray! Women and the Prayer of Persistence and Resistance

ESTHER MOMBO (KENYA)

*All this day, O Lord, let me touch as many lives as possible for thee; and every life I touch, do thou by thy spirit quicken, whether through the word I speak, the prayer I breathe, or the life I live. Amen. (Mary Sumner)*

*I have prayed the prayers of Sarah, of Hannah, Elizabeth, I have fasted, I have seen many doctors but still I am childless. Each time I am asked if I have a child and say no, I am pitied and prayed for and told to pray. Which prayers am I going to pray now!!? (Kiloi, a childless woman)<sup>1</sup>*

Prayer is an expression of faith that is both individual and communal. Prayer is to commune with God. Some people do it loudly while others do it in silence. Prayer can be taught and learned by communities of faith. Prayer involves praise, adoration, and petitioning God for our needs. Prayer is seeking God's favour and will for a person or community. The Bible records many forms of prayer and different people praying. Women in the Bible are depicted praying in various ways. In prayer some praise God for miracles that they have experienced. Miriam leads the children of Israel to rejoice because God has delivered them from the hands of the enemy. Other women like Sarah and Hannah pray to God to bless them with children. Prayer can provide an authentic response to the action of the Spirit in a woman's life. It will grow out of her own experience rather than being imposed. It may involve reimagining and reinterpreting Scriptures, within their own realities.

Today in many places prayer is performed with the entire body, with gestures of emotion and by moving about the room with singing, adding intensity and earnestness to the words. The prayers of Mary Sumner and Kiloi above are a case in point. Those who accompany women in their prayer experiences realize the need not to be within the traditional comfort

---

<sup>1</sup> Kiloi, oral interview, 8 August 2018.

zones but to listen to the deep signs of anguish and pain experienced by women in the different stages of life.

This chapter, using the church in sub-Saharan Africa as a case study, will examine the ways in which church women's groups pray and interpret prayer through their activities. It will also discuss ways in which women in prayer identify themselves with women of the Bible, and finally how through prayer and worship, women's groups are able to transform themselves and their communities. In conclusion it will show that church women's groups have created a renewing spirituality of persistence and resistance by interpreting their circumstances in their own ways.

### From Prayer Groups to Women's Organizations

Women are the majority in the African church, and uniformed African women's organizations are a pillar of most of its churches today. These organizations have different names depending on the denomination or country. Most of them have a uniform that distinguishes them in terms of membership and what they stand for. Organizations such as the United Society of Friends Women International (Quakers), Mothers' Union (Anglican), Women's Guild (Presbyterian), and Dorcas (SDA), examples from East Africa, provide spiritual and moral support for women. These groups have some autonomy in the way they exercise their freedom to minister to one another, to explore Scriptures together, and to speak of their family lives and their lives as a whole. They are a source of financial support for the churches through fundraising. In responding to human need they explore the Scriptures and apply them in the various ministries they carry out. The groups seek to bring justice and wholeness to a society that is in pain from war, hunger, thirst, disease, and hopelessness. Even though the groups are each distinct in regard to the denomination and they approach issues in distinct ways (reflecting the church tradition they represent), they are all about creating a family that is in line with what the church teaches.

The history of these organizations goes back to the beginnings of mission work in Africa as noted by several studies.<sup>2</sup> Mission work among

---

<sup>2</sup> Isabel Phiri, D. V. Govinder, and S. Nadar (eds.), *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women in Faith in Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2007); Nyambura J. Njoroge, *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation* (Legon: Theological Studies Series Publisher, 2000); Modupe Labode. 'From the Heathen Krall to Christian Home: Anglican Mission Education and African Christian Girls', in F. Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, and Shirley Ardener (eds.), *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions* (Oxford: Berg, 1993),

women was seen as an important part of mission for two reasons. First, it was one way of liberating women from what the missionaries then saw as oppression of women. Modupe Labode has described these oppressions as traditional practices of food taboos and initiation, marriage, and funeral rites.<sup>3</sup> The missionaries chose to offer education to the girls, aiming to make them good ‘Christian mothers’ and enable them to enter professions such as teaching if circumstances allowed.

According to Isabel Phiri, the Presbyterian women’s organization in Malawi called *Chigwirizano* was founded for women to pray together but also to give them the opportunity to do something for themselves and others. It also gave women a sense of belonging, providing scope for the development of leadership talent among women. They viewed themselves as daughters of God who had received the Spirit of God that was provided for everyone. This brought a lot of confidence to women, made them see Scripture in a new way, and made them see themselves as those sent by God. Phiri asserts that a ‘wind of self-awareness’ is blowing among Christian women in Africa. Women are becoming conscious that they have been at the periphery and that they are not the same as men.<sup>4</sup> Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, writing about the Baptist Church, discusses *Umodzi Wa Mai*, which has weekly prayer meetings. In these weekly meetings women have a lot of flexibility to teach each other principles of Christian living, ranging from topics that are relatively solemn to those that are very relaxing and interactive.<sup>5</sup>

Nyambura J. Njoroge has written on the Presbyterian Church of East Africa’s Woman’s Guild (PCEA), which in colonial times combined prayer, resilience, and public witness. The members formed a council known as the *Kiama Kia Ngo* (the Council of the Shield) as a means of carrying out campaigns against female circumcision. ‘The women were able to speak out against their dehumanization, and against being defined and spoken for by others.’<sup>6</sup> The *Kiama Kia Ngo* evolved into the Woman’s Guild in 1923.

---

pp. 126–42; Isabel Apawo Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experiences of Chewa Women in Central Malawi* (Blantyre: Claim, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Labode, ‘From Heathen Kraal to Christian Home.’

<sup>4</sup> Isabel A. Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi* (Blantyre: Kachere, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, Klaus Fiedler, and Johannes W. Hofmeyr (eds.), *African Feminist Hermeneutics* (Luwingu, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2016); Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, *A History of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians 1989–2007* (Luwingu, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2017), p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> Njoroge, *Kiama Kia Ngo*.



The United Society of Friends Women started as a weekly prayer group which met on Thursdays and Fridays: the individual groups were known by the days on which they met, i.e. *Haramisi* (Thursday) or *Jumaa* (Friday). The prayer meetings were organized on an informal basis, with women making their own rules and regulations. The women met for prayer, devotion, and evangelism and to give each other support over the challenges they were facing as pioneer Christian women in growing Christian families.<sup>7</sup>

The Mothers' Union (MU) of the Anglican Church was founded by Mary Elizabeth Sumner in 1876 at Old Alresford, near Winchester, Hampshire. Founded in a particular context in England, it had these objectives:

To uphold the sanctity of marriage;

To awaken in all Mothers a sense of their great responsibility in the training of their boys and girls (the Fathers and Mothers of the future);

To organize in every place a band of Mothers who will unite in prayer and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness of life.<sup>8</sup>

Through weekly devotional meetings the MU supported women in sustaining their families. From 1893 the movement began to spread to other places in the Anglican communion as part of the expansion of the Communion. Today it is a strong organization, especially in Africa, where its story can be told within each province and diocese. In Kenya the first enrolment of MU members was on 4 March 1956 at Mwingoiya Church in the Diocese of Mount Kenya South. Mrs Gladys Beecher was instrumental in setting up the MU in Kenya. It has become a strong organization in each diocese and, as noted above, provides support for many churches.

Writing about the women's groups in South Africa, Deborah Gaitskell provides a good summary of the beginnings of such groups:

... the first women's prayer unions seem to have evolved not from mission schools but from devotional meetings started by white missionary women for 'uneducated' adults. Such women first met weekly in sewing classes, which were a feature of mission stations among *Twana* and *Zulu* for example, from the 1830s because to be 'dressed' or 'clothed' in Western rather than Africa fashion was identified with seeking Christian Instruction or baptism ... the

---

<sup>7</sup> Esther Mombo, 'Haramisi and Jumaa: The Story of Women's Meetings in East Africa Yearly Meeting, 1902-1979', *Woodbrooke Journal*, 5 (Autumn 1999), 1-25.

<sup>8</sup> Mothers' Union, *The Book of Prayer and Supplication* (Nairobi: ACK Uzima Publishing House, 2014), p. 9.

gendered assumption that clothing as predominantly a female responsibility thus served to create distinctively Christian group solidarity among women in virtually all the Christian denominations. Those who sewed together then prayed together.<sup>9</sup>

The link between prayer and women's roles in the family and society was a heavy responsibility. With African women taking charge of the women's organizations, women learned from early on that through prayer they could revisit and deal with issues that affected them in their society. The prayer meetings became a space where devout domesticity thrived. The women assumed family and community responsibilities especially during the colonial period, when men moved away from their rural homes to the urban or plantation centres in order to look for work. Burdensome rural responsibilities and the absence of men led women to unite and even to pray more.

Through the prayer meetings, women were able to find support and encouragement for each other and to face the conflicts between their domestic duties and the church. As well as giving women support, the prayer meetings were very active in evangelism and bringing more women from the community to church. The prayer groups also served as learning spaces for women on subjects such as the Bible, evangelism, singing, childcare, nutrition, family life, and subsistence farming. Lessons were preceded and justified by biblical texts. It was through these prayer groups that women's leadership emerged. The women's prayer groups had been active in the colonial churches in Africa and continued to be active in the postcolonial era, when they were challenged at times by the same issues of the colonial era. The examples below from groups in Kenya illustrate all these points.

### **Prayers on Old Issues and New Challenges**

With independence in 1963, church women's groups began revisiting old issues as well as new challenges to the family. In the post-independence period these groups engaged with issues that affected the families they were responsible for. In 1965 The United Society of Friends Women's annual conference brought to light the challenges of marriage and family,

---

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Gaitskell, 'Power in Prayer and Service: Women's Christian Organizations', in Richard Elphic and Rodney Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), p. 255; Isabel Apawo Phiri, Devakarsham Betty Gavinden, and Sarojini Nadar (eds.), *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 2002).