

Theological Reflections for Sounding the Bamboo 2010

by Kay Cho

Eve: Who Is She?

The Toronto Star, a daily newspaper, on Tuesday, April 27, 2010, reported on two women's issues: one on the front page, another on the third page. The front page photo showed surrogate mothers at a clinic in India, which pays them \$7,000 to carry fertilized eggs for foreign couples. The story tells of a "booming womb-for-hire industry" and "baby farms."

On the third page of the paper a photo shows a woman getting dressed after going topless during a "Boobquake" event in Vancouver. The story gives the background about a senior Tehran cleric who suggested that women wearing revealing clothing cause earthquakes. Tens of thousands of women refuse to believe flaunting their breasts would trigger "a world-wide Boobagedoon." Therefore, a 22-year-old Purdue university student encouraged the women around the world 24-hour protest, flaunting their breast and cleavages to prove the Iranian clerics wrong. The result? There was some shuddering of the Earth measured, "but no more than usual."

These stories are good examples of a presumption widely in the church and society around the world that women are to be blamed for natural disaster or exploited in their bodies. Women are often depicted as seductive, lustful, evil in their sexuality as the descendant of Eve, the first woman, in religions, histories, myths, arts, literature, and Western attitudes through the centuries.

All through those centuries, theologians have struggled to figure out who Eve is, what her behaviour means, what her story is all about. Some theologians have come to a conclusion that Eve's action picking the forbidden fruit, in Genesis chapter 2, is a disobedient behaviour to God, and consequently she brought hard work, pain, and death to humanity and living things. She is often called "the lady of the rib," "devil's gate," and the source of all troubles, corruption, destruction, and disasters in universe. So, a woman is believed to be destined to live in guilt and interiority, oppressed, assaulted, and exploited, be called a sex-machine, baby-farm or factory, and the original sinner.

Other theologians have refused strongly to accept the above theological ideas based on sexism. Eve's disobedience is a "creative disobedience" (Dorothee Sölle), and they urge us to read the Bible "inside out" (T.Y. Cho) in order to discover what lies in deep down in the Bible stories, and who and how the stories shaped. Who are the shapers and tellers of the Bible stories?

We are gathered here as the descendants of Eve in our diversity. How would you shape the story of our foremother Eve? As the Sounding the Bamboo conference is progressing this weekend, let us figure out who the real Eve is and who we are, as her descendants.

The Original Sin or The Original Blessing?

The theme of this conference, “Eve, Mary, White Feather and Us...” has been explored through keynote speeches, worship, workshops, group activities, and cultural celebrations this weekend. What does it mean to us?

Eve’s creative disobedience is an initiation of tasting the sap of a real life—the juicy sap of joy, excitement, discovering the new world, learning new things, the power of reproduction and re-creation, free will.

Eve’s creative disobedience is to refuse to be the “lady of the rib” as a part of Adam (man) but an independent being created in God’s image as well as a man, and to be the equal partner with him. Eve discovers her identity, who she really is: “Mother of all the living.”

Eve’s creative disobedience is to refuse to be the “devil’s gate,” but co-creator with God by reproduction, creating history, discovering and venturing into God’s world in science, arts, technology, and human spirituality.

Eve’s creative disobedience is liberation of humanity from the forbidden, restricted frames of faith.

Eve’s creative disobedience is an original blessing, not original sin, to restore the original goodness of creation, as God said “it is good.”

One who finds her real independent identity from man is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is known as the second Eve. Mary is pregnant without a man, as we read in the gospel stories, but by the Spirit. The Virgin Mary could have a baby with no help from a man. She is pregnant with living things by the Spirit. Mary’s independent pregnancy is much more than her virginity and obedience.

Her independence is revolutionary, not only for her own time and place but also here and now, for you and me. If a virgin was known to be pregnant, she should have been stoned by the law at her time. With the risk of danger of death, she was creatively disobedient to carry the baby within her and praise, “My soul magnifies the Lord...My spirit rejoices... all generations will call me blessed...” She sings on, “God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty...” She dreams the whole human and world order upside-down, inside-out.

Mary wants to see the human and whole creation being changed in justice, peace, equality. She is pregnant and gives a birth and restores the original meaning and purpose of creation, leading to salvation of all living things. She teaches the child she is carrying (prenatal teaching in Asian culture) the redemption of the orders in household, world, and universe.

In reality, there are two kinds of sisterhood among the descendants of Eve and Mary: Sarah and Hagar, and Mary and Elizabeth. The sisterhood of Sarah and Hagar is a relationship between master and servant, fair and darker skin colours, first and second wives to Abraham. They fight for a man, jealous of each other in a power struggle. The sisterhood of Mary and Elizabeth is cooperative, compassionate,

mutually respectful and admiring, regardless their ages or local and cultural environment. Now we have a choice what kind of sisterhood we can create and maintain among us.

Among us, there are many birds with a white feather (although White Feather is an Aboriginal participant's name), black feather, red-wing black feather, yellow feather, blue feather, and so on. *Birds of a feather flock together!* It is the nature of the living things. They cannot survive long without flocking together. If they are separated and mingled with other feathered birds, I am afraid that the stronger will destroy the weaker feathered.

We are the differently feathered birds as the racial and ethnic minority women in the Sounding the Bamboo conference. We hope to fly together happily for a long time and over a great distance as we flock together by the feathers.