

The Daughters of My People: Human Rights at Home

The old song says,

Trouble in mind, Im blue,
My poor heart is beatin slow,
Never had so much trouble in my life befo'

Im gonna lay my head
on that lonesome railroad track,
but when I hear the whistle
Lord, Im gonna pull it back

Im goibng down to the river
Take along my rockin chair
and if the blues don't leae me,
I'll rock on away from thar

Well, trouble, oh, trouble,
trouble on my worried mind
When you see me laughin
Im laughin just to keep from crying

I think this song could easily have been written not just by po' black folks singing the blues in a racist South, but human rights workers as well. Oh, Trouble! Trouble in mind! My heart is breaking while my hands clap in time....gonna write another letter, gonna share my final dime, 'cos if I don't see some changes, they'll be trouble down the line...

Human Rights work is, as the saying goes, a 'tough row to hoe', and that's especially true for those of us who are from the good ole Us of A. We have a lot of explaining to do when we sit in multicultural meetings, work on global issues, or even stand up for the Bible and those who believe it has worth. We are the convenient 'cause celeb' for any government wishing to trash another; our issues are paraded out as part of any challenge to state sovereignty....but it was such a BAD state! We hear the government say after it has taken illegal action. Yet, our causes are the very first to go by the wayside after the war is won, the reconstruction begun, the trade deal sealed. Then we are told to stop making such a fuss, start learning pragmatism, because its going to be business as usual, and that was, indeed, the whole point. No wonder Jesus blesses the peacemakers: no one else is going to!

Oh, friends, trouble in mind!

A Muslim friend told me at the outset of taking up this burden for the sake of my own people's sin, that the business of HR is a tightly scripted, contentious and inbred little world. Every one has their part to play, and deviation from expectations of that role are neither welcomed nor tolerated. What's my part? I asked. Token goy, perhaps? I've played that before. No, she said, 'you are the naive passionate Westerner. You get to ask the questions no one else is willing to, and you do it under the cover of well-

meaning ignorance. You are still passionate; stay awhile in this work and all that's left is a sense of numbness and a need for faith.'

It's true; when you learn that the two Afghani women on the national council for the reconstruction of Afghanistan refused to sit at the same table, much less be photographed together! One a monarchist, the other a marxist, its easy to keep voicing the Rodney King existential question: Can't we all just get along? Can't the aid workers who have the money and the goods make common cause with the faith-workers who have the hearts of the people and can get the goods where they need to go? No, apparently, not: getting along and merging one's pool of resources around a common need is not on the table: aid workers are distrusted for their secular money and disrespect of traditional religions; faith workers are viewed by the other side as part of the problem and not part of the solution. It is only possible to shake ones head and sing the blues—trouble, trouble in mind. I am getting to have a lot more sympathy for Moses and his whining, complaining, not-very-efficient mixed multitude of escapees. I'm quite sure now that they all *didn't* get along, and a quick trip through the book of Numbers will back me up. Oh, trouble!

Trouble in mind!

Now imagine the scenario: trying to speak for global compassion while your own government is using your very own Bible to implement everything

but compassion. I have trouble, friends, great trouble with all that I hear coming out of the mouths of our unelected officials, especially with respect to religion. We hear we are a great, great country and that that is the effect of God's blessing and not human greed. We learn that, indeed, God has put our unelected leader at the head of the richest, most sophisticated military might in history for such a time as this: it can only be God who has done this, says the born-again Christian general, clad in his military uniform, as he addresses a Christian church. It must be God, because it sure wasn't the people.

Trouble!

Trouble in mind! When I hear the drivel and the prevarication that comes out of the mouths of our officials, our whining and ineffective political opposition, such as it is, when I hear the name of the Lord taken in vain again and again and used, like an American flag, to sell mindless nationalism as a Christian virtue—I turn up with a burning theological question: will no one speak for the honor of God? Oddly, the folks who take their Bible literally and with a blind eye are ALWAYS willing to tell you about God's honor: just go check out www.godhatesfags.com, or listen to their televangelists explain why God punished us with Sept. 11: not for any reason this group today might think, but because of those wicked liberals, feminists, fags and others! Yes, God will indiscriminately punish everyone within smiting range for transgressions

against the sexual or codes of racial orthodoxy, but oh, LORD! DON'T go mentioning t hat the very Gospels that don't say diddly-squat about sexual orientation have a whole LOT to say about rich and poor, wealth and poverty. They don't go mentioning that, now do they? Will no one speak for the Gospel, or is everyone busy saying, Lord, Lord! You know how *that's* gonna turn out in Matthew 25:

Then he will say to those at his left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 25:42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 25:43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 25:44 Then they also will answer, Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' 25:45 Then he will answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' 25:46 And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

What I find most especially disturbing as a theologian is that while the culturally captive side that reads the Bible 'for the worst', for exclusion and salvation of that special few, are willing to talk about ^{politics} ~~it~~ at length, those who

ought to be standing toe-to-toe, Bible in hand and making the case for Matthew 25 as the superior reading of American religiosity, those folks are sitting silent and embarrassed, clamming up as though there is no defense! Truly, the mainstream faith is troubled in mind: too namby-pamby to take on the tough texts, they—WE—let the Bible fall into hands that only know how to hit and not to heal! We wouldn't dream of disturbing our congregations with talk from the pulpit about real religious obligation to be true in the time of trial—for that is surely what we are in right now. No, not for us the fiery sermon, the relevant event, the horrifying prospect: we're busy promoting wholeness and a psychobabble kind of salvation that values personal comfort more than social change. No wonder the preachers of the new crusades against evil doers find us no threat!

I am going to be a threat by doing what I do on non-threatening days: I read my Bible. I refuse to cede this living text with all its fractures, failings and futilities into the hands of oppressors. No. People have died for this text, people have lived for this text, and as long as my government wants to quote it as a warrant for its imperial wars, I am going to refuse to let their reading be the only one.

How this government can claim to be Christian and do what it does—a recital

of the Geneva Convention is not needed here, since I am preaching to the converted----how the good ole' US of A can do what it does, rape and pillage the environment to the harm of all, refuse to forgo torture even of its own citizens, should they be unlucky enough to be brown and/or Muslim, how its can keep its little Guantanamo outpost and still look so smug—the mind boggles, the heart breaks. It's easy to sound like Isaiah:

New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies - I
cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. 1:14 Your new moons
and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a
burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. 1:15 When you spread
forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you
make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.
1:16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of
your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 1:17 learn to
do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless,
plead for the widow.

We always think of Human Rights as something out there, over yonder, a topic for those people who do not have our freedoms, our material blessings, the Bill of Rights. Well, for those raised in poverty, for the children of the poor

in our own country, Human Rights are an issue right down on the ground, happening here and now. What have we done, with our easy acceptance of blessings as our right, to be safeguarded and coerced from the rest of the world? A HR activist from another country, sent on a mission by the State Dept. determined to show that dissidents in the United States are not muzzled or censored—ha!, asked me: what does it feel like to belong to the most powerful and wealthy country history has ever known? Not good, I said, not good at all: although I benefit indirectly from this country's hegemony as much as any educated and employed person, I know only too well how hollow that wealth, freedom and power really ^{are} ~~is~~. When wealth is used only to secure ^{for more people} more wealth, instead of more well-being, there can be no true enjoyment, no real security, no enduring calm.

Let us consider the conditions of the daughters of the poor. You heard Leviticus: worth remembering that there are many worthwhile things in that book we love to hate for its exclusionary world view and navel-gazing fascination with purity. You shall not make your daughter into a prostitute. So—what about it?

Now a strange thing happened to me on the internet. My ISP sold itself for about the 3rd time and my browser got upgraded and I made a big mistake. The lives of professors are not exactly overripe with free time, so I often shop

on line. When I naively typed in 'lingerie' into my search engine, hoping to upgrade my family's underwear drawer, a terrible thing happened: an 'adult' toolbar, a nastier Trojan Horse virus as I've ever wrestled, came in and attached itself to my Windows registry. Each day I was treated to more and more pornography—visuals that have nothing to do with Free Speech or the First Amendment, or even the rather wholesome approach to the whole subject that exists in Amsterdam, one of my favorite multicultural cities. My email flowed with the sexual juices of American puritance: one morning I learned that 'Anorexic Chix suck.....well, you can finish the rhyme; the photos on the front page of that site showed me girls who looked as though they had just walked out of a death camp, performing sexual acts of a graphic nature that shall not be described here in chapel! Another site, 'Slapthatass.com' asked me poignantly on its home page, 'What won't these horny chicks do to pay for college?' Well, from what I saw, few things appear to be off limits, and ALL of them were living in my hard drive. Oh, trouble, trouble in files!

Now, the Hebrew Bible has a lot to say about the sexual goings-on attributed to the daughters of the chosen people, but its usually a metaphor about how MEN 'play the harlot' after strange gods. It not only expressed God's disgust at being cheated on, but also shames the targeted male population by comparing their behavior to that of women—a big no-no in

patriarchal ideology. Yes, I've got my Isaiah passages (3:16-4:1) that would allow me to condemn every one of those females disporting themselves for my viewing pleasure. But should the Bible reading stop there? I don't think so. We have to ask: WHY are young women so totally disassociated from their bodies that they think work in the sex trade is a good deal? WHY are they so in need of money to fund their educations? Because they are the daughters of the poor, that's why. Now, I'll grant you the few kinky girls whose emotional wounding has made them into women who find release in acting out the part of the object in full; I'll even grant you that sexual fantasies can be more-or-less healthy, and that at least on the Internet, the girls are spared the actual sex act since its all 'virtual'.

But as a daughter of the poor it was my fate to grow up living next door to a brothel, to see the practice on the street, and admire the bravery and the endurance of the young African American and Haitian girls, some all of eleven years old, who were trapped in that life. I agreed with them that the police of Miami and Dade County were no damn help, and more likely an aggressor than a savior. And I reluctantly agreed that they were indeed making more money on the street than in a dime store, or as a hotel maid, or an unwed mother on welfare.

So, I don't think prostitution is about a woman's right to privacy, such

that she can do whatever she wants with her body. I think its about money, and when I see the girls on the internet, I not only cry, I am furious. Why is there no living wage for the workers in this country? Why is there no health care for those on hourly wages, no educational opportunities so that the poor might hope to change their lot and pull themselves up by that famous bootstrap? Why, in the so-called greatest Christian nation in the earth? Education is the hope of the poor and a light to the world; to deny it is to ensure that the status quo remains right where it is.

Are there other options for the daughters of my people? Oh, sure there are: only consider the case of Private Jessica Lynch! Interviewed in sickening and sugary detail on television last night, we learned that rather than emptying her weapon fighting off Iraqis like Zena the Warrior Queen, she covered on the floor of her humvee when it came under attack. My husband blurted out, 'There's no way a little girl like that should ever have been put in such a situation!', and I agreed. Why was Jessica there at all? It was not because she was proving some issue on women's rights, or even that her country needed her to be there, but because she needed the money for college that the military provides. How many bodies lay strewn across the battlefields because they road to college led through the military-industrial complex? Those girls in the armed services are brave and decent and committed to their families; like the

sons of the poor, they find themselves where they are because they have no other choices open to them if they wish to improve their lot in life.

Somewhere along the line the social contract in America has been broken and trampled; we hear in Billy Joel's lament for the working class—again, boys who went to war, came back and expected some degree of decent treatment and a job with a living wage that let them fulfill their family responsibilities with dignity. Now, we ask for the bodies of the daughters, too; the street or the internet or the military option: what kind of choice is that?

For the cynic, it's amusing to see the knots our government gets tied in when it tries to reserve morality to itself while condemning the same actions in others: ah, yes, those wicked Iraqis showing photos of ~~dead~~ ^{the battered} bodies of our dead, parading our wounded captives before the camera! Tsk-tsk....! But what is it when the Pentagon sets out to rescue Jessica with a full camera crew at hand, films her distress, and makes up lies to turn her 'story' into a bigger, brighter picture of how well we are doing as conquerors? The exploitation of Jessica Lynch has its analog on the Internet: she is displayed for our viewing pleasure, to pump up our conviction, to 'strengthen our resolve'.

I invite you, dearly beloved, to strengthen YOUR resolve, to take up YOUR Bible and to challenge at every opportunity what is being done in your name. This is no namby-pamby faith to which we lay claim: this really is a

battle for the world and a vision of a compassionate God! Do what you have to, do what you must: stand like Gandalf on the Bridge at Kazak-dun and look on evil and say 'You shall NOT pass'! Do nothing, and you will surely have 'trouble in mind'.

This time around, there can be no 'passing by on the other side'. You are the neighbor to Jessica, to the dead whose flag-draped coffins are not allowed to be shown, to all those sucking chicks on the Internet. You must act, and act on the strength of your faith. This is no time for sitting idly by. In the midst of this, remember that the Lord of Hosts has provisioned you well: do we *have* a more useful, a more trustworthy ally than that discordant Bible with all its voices, singing out in all times and places? Is there a better way to fight fire than with fire? How shall we challenge those who want to tell us its about winning, that its time to 'Bring 'em on':

Just read 'em the Bible, my friends: here's a text from Matthew 7, for starters:

7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 7:16 You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? 7:17 So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit.

7:18 A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 7:20 Thus you will know them by their fruits. 7:21 "Not every one who says to me, Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 7:22 On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 7:23 And then will I declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'

They don't call it the Good Book for nothin'! Here is the remedy to trouble in mind!

Amen

Job 10:4-7:

Hast thou eyes of flesh? Dost thou see as humans see? 10:5 Are thy days as mortal days, or thy years as mortal years, 10

Matthew 25:31-40

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 25:32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 25:33 and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. 25:34 Then the King will say to those at his right hand, Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 25:35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 25:36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 25:37 Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? 25:38 And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? 25:39 And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' 25:40 And the King will answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

Community Life Day
April 14, 2004

Dearly Beloved Community of Most Esteemed Students, Staff, Faculty and
Guests, al salaam aleik! Shalom Aleichem! Peace be upon us!

Let me welcome you to Andover Newton's first Community Life Day, an
initiative planned and sponsored by the Faculty Community Life Committee
and the Academic Dean's Office. As you are very well aware, we are a quirky
little live-in hill allied with a far-flung and vibrant commuter community. Yet,



for the commuters, depending on which day you tend to take classes, you may not always meet and make as many new friends and contacts as you would like. You may not always have time apart from classes to put your fingers to the pulse of the Hill; you may not find the dining hall, or the bookstore, or the library open when you have the time to be there. We are all a little frazzled in our various ways; we wanted, as a group, as the gathered community, to become more intentional about sharing our visions, dreams, passions and concerns with each other to stimulate broader conversations about who we want to be and how we want to go about becoming that people. This is day is for all of us, and we even go so far as to lure you with a Free Lunch, to say 'thank you' for joining in this experiment. It may be that future CL events will take a different shape than today's event; we are living into our commitment to gather for the nourishment of theology, worship and a common meal. You will help us by giving us your ideas and candid responses.

Now, I must tell you that it is a daunting thing to be a Human Rights activist and speaker: imagine my problems coming to you today! As I was making last minute adjustments yesterday to this presentation, I wondered: will the truce in Fallujah hold? As of yesterday, over 600 Iraqi civilians, mostly women, children and elders, have died since April 5 due to the action of the US government in ordering its troops to institute collective punishment for the

mutilation of hostages the previous week? Let me leave a paragraph of space for the atrocities du jour, thinks the activist, for that is the way of things.

We must respond to the events of the day, as well as have our prepared remarks on broader topics ready to go. It seems to me that in HR work, we must be always ready, always alert: to evacuate, to respond, to handle the press, to engage our networks, to comfort the suffering, and arrange the recovery. Always. We do not have the luxury of getting to deliver that fine address we so carefully prepared, all the while thinking, 'But what of Najaf? Will we truly fire a shot in a city as holy to Shiite Muslims as the Vatican is to Roman Catholics? Will we indeed take the next step to Armageddon out of the pride and arrogance many of us have now come to associate with the armed US presence around the world? Sadly, I must always keep an open space in my talks to apologize for the most recent acts of my government: Matthew says it all (6:34): Sufficient unto the day [is] the evil thereof.

So, how should we proceed today? Should I wow you academically with my close literary readings of Human Rights Discourse, laying bare all its epistemological difficulties? Beginning at the beginning, I might tell you what human rights *are* exactly, and from whence scholars and lawyers believe they derive. (And in a world of ACC and biocentric pluralism,¹ an ecofeminist

¹ 'Biocentric Pluralism refers to the ethical position that just like individual living entities, ecosystems and species can be benefitted or harmed, and therefore have an ideal 'good' which inheres for them. Hence, they are moral subjects, capable of having interests and rights (James P.

might also add the pertinent question: why is it that only the human species is accorded rights?) *Is* it true as Natural Law philosopher John Locke said, that certain rights are inalienable? Are rights really present if one cannot enjoy them, or if there is no way to enforce them? How do we establish universal rights in a plural world—will the UDHR do the trick for everyone? Indeed, does not all this focus on the worth of a single individual, the ‘sovereign self’ as I have called it in my work, suggest that the whole concept of HR is beholden to a Eurocentric individualism that cannot be considered especially normative or useful for the rest of the world?

Does the recognition that someone does in fact have a ‘right’ (such that they are considered a right-bearer) always imply a duty-bearer who must respect or at least, not hinder, the enjoyment of the right-bearer’s right? And is the ‘right’ itself the real matter at stake or is it the object of the right which the right-bearer is seeking to enjoy?² Do rights emerge as a function of

Sterba, *Three Challenges to Ethics: Environmentalism, Feminism, and Multiculturalism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 29-31. From the point of view of this ethical framework, the claim of the human species to be superior to other species becomes unsupportable.

² Jack Donnelly, *The Concept of Human Rights* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), pp. 11-44. Donnelly concludes that Human Rights are rights every human has just by being born human. Martin E. Marty, ‘Religious Dimensions of Human Rights’, in John Witte, Jr. and Johan D. van der Vyver (eds.), *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1996), pp. 1-16; Michael J. Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 16-20.

hypothetical contracts, or are contracts only possible in the context of rights? Are we obliged to be able to show rational, universal grounds for positing human rights before we can enforce them? Are HR derived from logic and reasoning, or do they only make sense in a frankly theological framework where human dignity is based on the Creator's gift of the Divine Image to our species? This bears on the question of whether human rights are absolute--- that is, should they be considered a normative requirement, regardless of culture, tradition, national laws, religion, or time of war, and so on?³

These are only some of the questions of jurist and moral philosophy that beset those of us who would like to establish universal human rights, and you'll be glad to know that, as they say in Hollywood, I've 'decided to go a different way' today. I will just say to all this philosophy that for those of us in a pragmatic, advocacy positions with respect to entitlement to rights, we do NOT cede that a right does not exist simply because a group is not allowed to enjoy it (or its object), no one is willing to enforce it, or because the religious teachings of the community in question do not choose to recognize that right explicitly or implicitly. Wherever we choose to lodge the source of universal human rights, be it God or Natural Law or post-patriarchal, post-colonial

³ Sterba, *Challenges*, pp. 27-49, 77-103; Donnelly, *Concept*, pp. 80-88; Perry, *Idea*, pp. 87-106.

anthropology, activists do believe them to exist, even in the absence of their enjoyment, enforcement or cogent foundation. This point is especially important for religious reformers, since they generally attempt to argue that human rights are grounded in their scriptures and only require recognition or enforcement to correct their denial to certain groups, such as women, children, aliens, and dissenters—some of the typical groups who are usually driven to the margins in most religions' thinking about rights.

Simply put, human rights are rights which belong to every human, simply by virtue of being born human. The extended effect of these intrinsic rights is that there are some things which should never be done to *any* human, just as there are some things which ought to be done for *every* human.

Simple enough, or so you would think, right up until you wade into the discourse on how to ground those rights! (This quest for epistemological lucidity has been dubbed 'Human Rights Foundationalism', and is sometimes felt to be a theoretical barrier to the activity of securing and enforcing human rights.)

But this is *our* CLD, and one of the great goals of HR education is to empower local communities to use a HR framework to solve their immediate

problems, connecting their own travails to similar struggles going on in a globalized world. So, although my heart breaks and there are stories to be told, I will not take time today to tell you about the Green Harvests of Cambodia, where every single girl-child in a village is sold to sex-slave traffickers. The slavers lure families into selling their daughters to become, they think, well-paid maids in tourist hotels. The destination of these little girls is anything but decent work; they are doled out at ages 4 and 5 to tourists when they arrive for their sex tour, and the children, after their defilement, habitually wind up dying in brothels of HIV by age 6-10. The best we can say, I suppose, is that their life in this trade is mercifully brief—but is that the best we can do as a household of faith? Pray for them, yes! But can you, would you be willing to do more? Our great Dean and President of the 1970s-80s, George Willis Peck, known to you from the Peck Lounge, used to challenge us at every baccalaureate sermon: “If being a Christian became a capital crime tomorrow, would there be enough evidence to arrest you?”

I could swamp you with statistics about the plight of the world’s children: 25,000 street kids, orphaned by parents strung out on heroin addictions, in Teheran, Iran—problems so massive that the Islamic Fundamentalist state there now provides state-subsidized birth control! That is one approach to the problem of children at risk, I guess. Or, should we

speak of the 50,000 'night commuters' of northern Uganda, children who flee their villages and towns nightly to seek shelter in Kampala and other cities where they hope to be safe from kidnapping by the LLA, 'Lord's Liberation Army', who will turn them into murdering soldiers and military sex slaves. The children sleep outdoors in the courtyards of hospitals, schools and churches where there is no supervision or much aid given, but where they hope walls will keep them safe from the LLA. The rainy season is coming and the children are already infected with massive attacks of scabies; those who care for them fear that fever will be next as the children sleep in the rain. A seminarian at St. Mary's Seminary in Kampala, Joseph Galiwango, writes to me this Easter:

"I pray that the Risen Christ, his kingdom and love may be real in our lives. Jesus loved all human race without discrimination: He loved men, women, white, black, sick, lame, crippled, sinners, and the lonely. This love is not yet real in our hearts; that is why there is a lot of suffering in the world".

He goes on to tell me that he is fasting all of Holy Week and will give his food money to those who provide for the Night Commuters. Since Joseph digs ditches before and after his seminary classes to pay for his education and still send a little money back home to his family in an outlying village, we have here evidence of a living parable: his 'widow's mite', given freely and to his

own physical detriment—it must be very hard to dig ditches day after day with no food! He writes to me to tell me that his seminary has so few books; it is not possible to speak of the biblical place of women and children, his great concern, when there is so much that is not available to him as a student of scripture. Why does he write to me? Ah, I am currently in reruns in Uganda and elsewhere, and our ANTS website—praise God, Ben Griffin, the Trustees and Karen Brockney—is easy to find, even in Kampala. Perhaps some members of this community do not know what a presence we have out in the world, in the most unlooked for places—but claiming that knowledge puts a whole new construction on our visions of ourselves as a theological community, doesn't it?

As you can see, I could go on and on and on: first-hand stories of a woman who has personally eaten a goat for Human Rights. I never expected to have a life of adventures, but indeed: even a bible geek, in proper circumstances, can play 'Spot the Spy' at the Embassy Dinner, or 'Bribes Are Us'. I could tell you all the great proverbs I have encountered—and even written—in HR work with Muslim, African and Asian HR communities:

Trust in Allah—but tie up your camel!

The cockroach knows well how to dance in the sun—it is the fat chicken who stops him! If you want to know if something will work, try it out

in the villages first!

Clear head, clean hands: but don't get hung up on it!

Either help us or stand aside; we have work to do.

But mainly, I want to tell you today that there is often a great chasm between religious activists and HR activists, and it is always a shock to discover that we who hold our Scriptures dear and sacred are not usually viewed by the folks on the ground as a ever-present help in time of trouble, as the Psalmist would say. Yes, those who look, as Job complains God *doesn't*, with 'eyes of flesh', from a human perspective, do not automatically accept our intentions as universal, or dedicated to relieving this-worldly suffering. If we are too busy glorying in the sacred blood of the Passion, our eyes on the prize of eternal salvation for our personal sovereign soul, it is easy to miss the equally sacred blood soaking the soil of Iraq, the occupied Palestinian territories where 70% of all residents now have insufficient access to food, water, or medical services, or we lose sight of the African continent swept with HIV epidemics which could have been prevented. People from the households of faith are required to prove themselves in HR contexts, and I think it breeds a wholesome humility in us to realize that we can be part of the problem as well as part of the solution.

Now, just because one professor takes the book of Job and ancient Near

Eastern texts seriously as potentially positive voices in a HR context, it does not automatically follow that a whole community gets interested along with her. However, what has struck me about our hillfolk, all categories, for the last year, is precisely how much we yearn for a common vision of resistance and dissent to many of the things we see the American Empire planning and doing. I did not decide to make a Council on Human Rights for Andover Newton, though one could view it as the reincarnation of our old 'Social Justice' committee that used to organize and plan our public witness at events of peace and justice around town and in the NE region. In fact, it was in the conversation and questions of students and their groups, that I discovered there was something like a common vision forming: a need to protest the destruction of the world and its diverse creatures from a clear and intentional perspective of faith. That is why I am here today speaking. It is not only my voice that speaks here today, because my strength, and hence my voice, comes from you. Listen to the voices of this community, and the concerns that burden your hearts and engage your ministries:

Rise up, and speak, O Household of God!

I want to end here, by telling you to be of good cheer, to keep on keeping the faith, enlarging your ministry, and rejoicing always, though I

know it may sound like strange advice under the global and local circumstances. Transform yourself and your seminary career: be persistent in study and prayer, penitence and praxis—these will sustain you in the struggle.

But you need to be proactive and reach out beyond our dear and ancient knowledge; the secular world has much to teach us. Our renewal areas in the curriculum are little living laboratories for testing out how science, art, medicine, global witness, and public life can be transformed and renewed by knowledge and practice from diverse sources. We are fielding caregivers who do not require the AMA as *their* source of healing power; we are preparing pastors who can deliver worship which seeks to unleash the power of God's love in the here-and-now, confident in doing so because their own life of faith is grounded deep in the daily experience of the whole person. The arts of the spirit and the hands teach us how to survive and why we survive; they give us the strength to confront the pain that comes from knowledge of and participation in the world's suffering. Our initiatives in global Christianity and public theology aim to take that renewed energy and faith into the public world where social change must be effected.

So my message of hope to you is this: There are things that work! There are changes for the good in progress! You might not see it in Washington, DC—yet!, but with more people like you and me united together, perhaps we

will one day soon see compassion and sanity return to the halls of our government. I do not want you to be overwhelmed by the size of the job to be done: have we not always said that the harvest is great, but the workers are few? We know this. It is one of the reasons, IMHO, that we must join hands, hearts and resources with HR communities, foundations, lawyers and activists in every land, to add our voices, hands and budgets to theirs to make the changes for which our world cries out.

I look out at you and I see the people of God. I see a people who have suffered, but who endure. I see people with checkbooks; I see hands that surf, and brains that compose angry letters; I see feet that march and voices that cry out, "Not in *our* name!" I see a faculty who could easily make its theological and devotional writing available to the poor seminarians of the world like Joseph, digging ditches in Kampala, who has no books, but writes to thank the professor who allows full-text of her articles to appear on the internet, despite the copyright issues. I see a staff that might conduct its own human rights assessment of our hill as a workplace, thereby enlarging our sense of equity and solidarity across our many functional divisions of labor. I see trustees who could help shape our vision in material ways; I see administrators who can begin to incorporate 'human dignity' as a key factor in the painful decisions they must make every day to keep our little Hill open and

fiscally sound.

You think it does not matter whether you answered the email Action Alert from CoHR? Amina Nawal of Nigeria has had her death sentence by stoning for bearing a child while divorced commuted, thanks to the 6 million emails received in Nigeria about her case, some of them bearing the address of Andover Newton. There are so many things that need doing, legally and materially, but God willing, we intend to prevail: we will change the official definitions of torture in the Geneva Conventions to include sexual crimes against women so we can bring offenders to trial. We will stop the international sex-trade and the spread of HIV/AIDS which it promotes: Canada, Switzerland, and Lord love 'em, the state of New York are even now shutting down and prosecuting the travel agencies in the West whose lucrative sex-trade business supports these crimes. We will implement controls that make Free Trade into Fair Trade. We will address Greenhouse emissions and change to sustainable forms of energy. We will make our own leaders respond to the will of the people, and we will denounce a theocratic government that would amend our Constitution to protect us from the dreaded Other, but cut down our forests, drill our arctic preserves, abridge our civil liberties, put more lead, mercury and sewage into our water, discard our wounded veterans who have served so selflessly, and spread hate and lies in cynical political

maneuvers to cover its own incompetence.

We will do these things. People of faith must do these things, or be held accountable. You may have heard it said, 'Faith without works is dead!' You know the Gospel; you know the world; you know the yearning of your own heart: what can separate you from the love of God? No wall, no line of soldiers, no entrenched practice, no lack of resources can blunt your purpose if you entrust it to God. The children of the world are waiting for your ministry.

Awake! Awake, O People of God!

Addendum: Human Rights Cities and Education Institutions

IV. KATI, MALI

-Being Facilitated by PDHRE-MALI and PDHRE,

Population 45,000; religions: 90% Muslim, 8 % indigenous; 1% Christian

The Hymn of the HR City

BEING HUMAN IS PRECIOUS By Mrs. Makalu Awa Danbele

Our sister, where are you headed I'm headed to the boat of respect

Our brother, where are you headed?

I'm headed to the boat of respect-in-return

And you there, you who look like our father, where are you headed?

I'm rushing to the boat of self-knowledge

And you there, you who look like our mother, where are you headed?

I'm running to the boat of education

Indeed! Being Human is precious, at every moment

Yes! Respect is precious, at all times

For sure! Respect is precious, eternally!

My people in the mother!

Let's intercede to pardon those who have been thrown off from Being Human

Let's steady the minds of those who have been swayed from Being Human

Indeed! Being Human is forever!

Being Human sets right the world!

Yes! Happy are those who know their rights as Humans!

Let us be among those who know their rights as Humans!

Let us be among those who carry the message of those rights!
Listen to me, brave people of the land of Sido-Jara and of Bazando
You, from the hana mountains
People from Bama hare, from Beledugu, from Manden, from Kaso.
From Kehedugu, from the Songhoi, from Seno, from Masina.
From Ginbale, from Guruma, from Segou.
I have come to entrust myself to you, so let's head together to Kati Jara.
Let's fill this big boat with Human Beings Being Human:
Our elders with their meaning-filled message of unity
Our youth with their brand-new feasts for our eyes
Our women with their care giving that can never be repaid
Our men with their rock - like ways of standing guard.
Let's make a mountain of our Human Being ness!
And for those who let go of the way, let us put their feet back on the path to Human Being ness
For those who get lost in the wild, let us show them where home is
For those who are in the dark, let us enlighten them to Human Being ness!
Let us be the rays of light that make this big boat a shining beacon
And when anyone falls overboard, let's pull him or her back on board.
Let Consensus-Building be the praise song of our Black Land
Let Mutual Respect and Mutual-Aid be the praise song of our great Mali
And let Knowing-Self and Knowing-Work be our Children's instruction guideboard

The Beginning

Allentown, Billy Joel

Well, we're living here in Allentown
and they're closing all the factories down
Out in Bethlehem they're killing time
filling out forms, standing in line,
so we're waiting here in Allentown

Well, our fathers fought the second world war
Spent their weekends on the Jersey Shore
Met our mothers in the USO
Asked them to dance, dance with them slow
And we're living here in Allentown
But the restlessness was handed down
And it is getting very hard to stay.....hey hey hey oh oh

But we're waiting here in Allentown
For the Pennsylvania we never found
All the promises our teachers gave
If we worked hard, if we behaved
So the graduations hang on the wall
But they never really helped us at all
No they never taught us what was real,
Iron and coal and chromium steel
So we're waitin' here in Allentown
But they've taken all the coal from the ground
And the union people thrown away....hey hey hey...oh oh
 Every child had a pretty good chance
 To get at least as far as their old man gets
 But somehintg happened on the way to that place
 They threw America right in our face
Well, I'm living here in Allentown,
And its hard to keep a good man down,
but I won't be getting up today.....hey hey hey...oh oh
And it's getting very hard to stay.....
And we're living here in Allentown.