

## **What Are They Saying About Women Doing Mission Theology?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents the mission theology of women from three groups: World Evangelical Fellowship, Catholic women, and theologians from the American Society of Missiology. It explores historical theologies and methodologies of women in mission as outlined by contemporary women missiologists. The focus is particularly on changes in mission theologies in the post WWII period. Connections with traditions of mission theology and common themes among women mission theologians are drawn. Questions for further research are posed. This paper is a small part of a larger project outlining and assessing mission theologies of contemporary women through interviews, writings, and published works.

Women have been doing mission theology for centuries. The emphasis until recently has been on the *doing*, rather than on the *theology*. If you follow the feet of women missionaries from the first through the twentieth century, however, you will see various theologies of mission in action.

### **Changes in Women's Mission Theology since WWII**

#### *A Story*

Let me begin with a story, told to me personally just a few weeks ago by Rev. Carol Chamberlain Rose Ikler. Rev. Ikler is ninety-two years old, the first woman to be ordained by the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1958. Her life illustrates the changes for women doing mission theology since WWII. She lived through those changes.

Born into a family of four generations of ministers, Carol's youth was marked by the hospitality of parents deeply involved with social issues of the day. Her father, a

Congregational minister, did inner city ministry in the slums of New York City and her mother led the choir at Riverside Church. As a young person, the influence of Walter Rauschenbusch and Harry Emerson Fosdick shaped her theology of mission.

During her college years, Carol spent summers doing mission work. She cared for patients in a mental hospital, worked with Japanese children in internment camps, and gave children made homeless by the war opportunities to do outdoor camping in the mountains of Switzerland. Graduating in 1942 from Mt. Holyoke College, Carol went on to study at Union and Columbia in a joint program. She then went to Hawaii where she spent eight years working with the Congregational Church as director of children's ministry.

On her return, a crisis of faith led her to Yale Divinity School where she studied with the Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr and other prominent theologians. Her professors helped her to solidify her progressive theology and she went on to become one of the editors of the Faith and Life Curriculum for the Presbyterian Church. "H. Richard Niebuhr came nearer to being Jesus to us than any other professor" she said (Interview April 26, 2012, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary).

Carol Ikler's journey illustrates the changes in women doing mission theology since WWII. During the war, opportunities for women to do mission work that was usually the work of men were many. Both the ecumenical movement and the women's movement in the church were vibrant during the 1940s. Her time at Union and Columbia coincided with the birth of the World Council of Churches. Carol said it was a time of great excitement and expansion in the intellectual and practical worlds of theology. Those changes created opportunities for women. Women students were welcomed at Union Seminary. Ordination for women began to be considered as talents of women began to be recognized and utilized by the church.

Studies at Yale continued to open paths for Carol Ikler and other women to do serious work in theology. Last year Yale celebrated “70 years of women at Yale.” Carol was one of the pioneers of women doing mission theology. She looks back at the changes with humility, grateful for the opportunities she was able to pursue. She speaks of theology as a practice, something she does every day. Grappling with theological ideas, studying the works of others, and reformulating her own thoughts in light of Scripture form an important part of Rev. Ikler’s spirituality. She credits the Holy Spirit for direction in those endeavors and the church for nurturing them. Young women today, she says, seem surprised that there was ever a time when women were not ordained, were not leaders in the church, were not doing theology. For that we can be grateful to women like Carol Rose Ikler.

*This Paper*

North American women are doing mission theology from a number of perspectives in our contemporary world. A few of those will be examined in this paper. Women’s voices from The World Evangelical Fellowship, Roman Catholic missions by women, and views of women in our own society, the American Society of Missiology, will be described. We will note connections of the women’s theologies with the major theological voices of their traditions, outline the methods whereby those theologies are implemented, and discover common themes among them. This paper is a small part of a much larger project on contemporary women doing mission theology that focuses on interviews and written work of missiologists and mission workers around the world. To augment that work, this paper will ask some questions about further research on common themes on how women’s theologies might influence missiology and ecclesiology.

*Context:*

Social changes in the United States and around the world since WWII make finding theologies of Christian mission by women much easier. WWII itself laid the groundwork for women in the United States to participate more fully in the workplace. A wave of feminism in the 1970s furthered that freedom. Academic positions began opening up for women and Protestant churches began to ordain women, recognizing their leadership capabilities. Women's independence on the mission field also increased as para-church organizations developed in the second half of the twentieth century. Immigration from Africa and Asia and the proliferation of world religions in the U.S. brought the mission field home, giving women more opportunities to work and reflect on mission and Christianity. Finally prominent Christian women like Frances Willard, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mary McCleod Bethune, Dorothy Day, and Mother Theresa provided role models for women called into mission service.

### **Part I: Evangelical Women's Mission Theologies**

Evangelical women participating in the World Evangelical Fellowship provide insights into the content and methods of evangelical women's mission theologies. In 1999 the Iguassu Missiological Consultation brought together 160 missiologists in Brazil. The publication of the papers from that consultations included with "The Iguassu Affirmation" outlining the mission theology of the World Evangelical Fellowship at that time. It also included thirty-five articles by men and five articles by women. One article was co-authored by seven men and one woman. Additional articles by Samuel Escobar and Christopher Wright were added before publication.

The Iguassu Affirmation provides a base line of evangelical mission theology. It was crafted by WEF Missions Commission leadership David Tai-Woong Lee and Jim Stamoolis, revised by a team of seven from various continents, and discussed in groups at the meeting itself (Taylor, 2). The Affirmation includes fourteen declarations of evangelical mission

theology that stress the foundations in the authority of Scripture, the saving work of Jesus Christ, the Trinitarian basis for mission, and the importance of the church in fulfilling God's plan for the world (Taylor, 17-21).

The articles by women reveal a number of theological themes and emphases that differ from the text of the Affirmation developed by their male colleagues.

Antonia Leonora van der Meer's article stresses the missionary's ongoing relationship with God and the calling from God that drives the work of mission. She uses the Scriptures to emphasize the unity of the human race, and the love of Jesus for all nations—a love that broke through the disciple's prejudices, preparing them for a worldwide ministry (van der Meer in Taylor, 151). She relies on the mission theology of David Bosch, drawing out the thread of God's relationship of love as a basis for mission (van der Meer in Taylor, 153). Mission, according to van der Meer is “the fruit of the love of God (van der Meer in Taylor, 153). It is “caring for whole human beings with the compassionate love of God” (van der Meer in Taylor, 154).

Van der Meer brings her emotions into her theology. “When Christians and even missiologists call Africa ‘the cursed continent,’ call African culture ‘demonic,’ and look down upon our African brothers and sisters, I become very angry” (van der Meer in Taylor, 154). She shows empathy for the suffering of extreme poverty many faced in Angola and declares that “in response to my caring, many believed (van der Meer in Taylor, 155).” She stresses enabling the local people to do the work of mission, not rejecting some groups as heretics but treating all as those who have the right to learn and understand what Jesus commanded us in Matt. 28:20 (van der Meer in Taylor, 157). In these and other ways, van der Meer changes the tone of evangelical mission theology from one of authority and effectiveness, to one of

respect, compassion and whole engagement of the mind and the emotions in the work of mission.

Miriam Adeney's essay centers on the theme of unity-in-diversity, couching respect for American subcultures in the language of Ephesians 1:9—the mysterious plan of God to bring all things together in Christ. She advocates seeing the subcultures of the United States as unique and precious particularities to be explored and embraced. “This means teaching unity at every opportunity” she declares (Miriam Adeney in Taylor, 385). It is in Adeney's essay that we hear the condemnation of racism and classism, ideas that seem distant from the formal Affirmations of the consultation. Adeney connects her anthropological insights and social analysis about American compartmentalization with her convictions about the respect and unity that American Christians must foster in order to tell the story of how God in Christ brings together all things.

Rose Dowsett's essay gives an overview of problems in the West, an analysis possibly sourced in Os Guinness' work. The creative part of her theology appears somewhere in the middle of her discourse when she introduces the topic of listening. She calls upon Christians to listen, not only to the Word, but also to non-Western churches. She describes the preferred attitude of that listening as humility (Dowsett in Taylor, 454). Dowsett argues that critical contextualization begins with humility and continues as a practice. Rather than a thought process, she describes contextualization as something the missionary *does*—“a living out of biblical truth in the here-and-now” (Dowsett in Taylor 455). Here, as in van der Meer's essay, Dowsett brings emotions into her theology. She says, “The Western church must listen with tears and pain and penitence (Dowsett in Taylor, 456).”

Paula Harris' article on the Nestorian church brings up the question of women's influence in earlier times. She wonders what influence clergy wives had on the church through their husbands. She speculates that queens and mothers of queens could have affected the course of Christian history in that part of the world. These wonderings show a keen interest in women's mission theologies and the desire to recover women's voices. Although she does express unity as a theological concept, Harris admires the Nestorian communities for their ability to display unity in the face of diversity (Harris in Taylor, 497).

Kathy Ross' reflections on the Iguassu Affirmation laments the lack of women's voices at the consultation. Here again, emotions are not ruled out as part of theological reflection as Ross says she is "shocked and disappointed" that women's perspectives are not heard (Harris in Taylor, 521). She brings out that although women represent two-thirds of missionaries worldwide, only nineteen out of one hundred sixty delegates were women. She speaks of the need for evangelicals to address women's issue as a response to the injustices that women suffer (Harris in Taylor, 530). Finally she stresses the importance of developing partnerships of equals in mission and advocates for humility in the process of interacting with Christians from other cultures and contexts (Harris in Taylor, 536).

The common themes in these articles by women are not difficult to find. Unity in diversity, the need for women's voices to be heard, careful listening, critical practices of contextualization and compassion, emotional expression, and humility are stressed in these articles. The Iguassu Affirmation might read differently if those themes were added to the evangelical mission theology already present in the document. Its tone would change—perhaps to a warmer, more friendly theology of mission for the twenty-first century.

## **Part II Catholic Women's Mission Theologies**

Women's Catholic mission theology has gone through major changes since WWII. In her book *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History*, missiologist Angelyn Dries describes WWII itself as an important marker for Catholic mission theology. Between 1946 and 1959, Maryknoll founder John Considine developed a broad vision to frame human societies into a Christian social order. Women in mission took on the fourfold goals of "world Christianity:" regard, love for, and knowledge of all cultures; promotion of the welfare of all; justice according to Christian ideals, and the transmission of Christ's teaching to non-Catholics, and non-Christians. (Dries, 168). The women who developed the U.S. Catholic school curriculum of this era focused on those goals, thus having a profound impact on future leaders of the Church. The curriculum emphasized the evils of racism and attitudes of superiority toward others, themes not dissimilar from some of the voices we heard by women in the World Evangelical Fellowship (Dries, 269).

By the 1960s mission to Latin America involved women in both pastoral ministry and education for women's leadership. The Sisters of St. Joseph brought a theology of the Mystical Body to Peru in 1965. They stressed the importance of living with the same privations as the people they were serving, becoming willing to receive gifts of religion and social warmth from the people (Dries, 185). Mary McCormick, a widow and lay volunteer demonstrated that theology spending twenty-seven years in Columbia. She organized a nutrition and milk program for young mothers, started a day-care center, and managed a loan program focused on housing. In addition she organized a four week "conscientization" program for North Americans so they could live with local families in Bogota and assist her in her work in the barrio (Dries, 195).

Two-thirds of the Papal Volunteers for Latin America (PAVLA) during that time were single women (Dries, 196). Those women had the opportunity to practice the Latin American liberation theology that was being developed by Jose Gutierrez and others. Many women missionaries focused on education with a two level approach. Educating the elite was crucial for the growth of the church but women missionaries also emphasized educating the poor, grooming them for a way out of poverty, and demonstrating the love of Christ at the same time (Dries, 225).

In the area of pastoral formation, Gretchen Berg, a Franciscan from Rochester MN started Regina Mundi, a two-year program that prepared Peruvian women to enter university. Through weekly seminars on liturgy, ecclesiology, Scripture, and the church in the modern world, the Sisters learned and discussed the latest theology. Conferences were sponsored that brought rich and poor congregations together for the first time (Dries, 207). Although conflict between rich and poor communities ended this effort in 1967, the women educators were at the forefront of practicing a theology that would significantly influence the Catholic mission theology in the coming decades (Dries, 213).

An important aspect of that theological vision for mission had to do with method. Mary Xavier O'Donnell, MM, stressed a new approach to evangelization of Hispanic groups in Chicago. In teaching the catechism of the Family of God, she affirmed the traditional family values that the people embraced, using what they already knew as a basis for understanding God in their lives. The emphasis was on hearing the Word of God in experience and community which then led to action (Dries, 218f). That liberation theology praxis model was used in women's groups: observe, act, judge (Dries, 225).

During this time, women religious moved from educational institutions into more pastoral work (Dries, 243). The formation of communities of the Word, an emphasis on team ministry and the development of lay leadership provided important trajectories for the new ecclesiology that the Church was embracing at the time of Vatican II. Women were at the forefront of implementing an ecclesial model that challenged the passivity and dependence that had marred the experience of many people in Latin America. Dries describes that ecclesial model as one that “emphasized the sacramentality of human beings, promoted cohesiveness and collective experiential knowledge, and brought the Word of God to bear on daily life (244). As missionaries listened to people telling the stories of their own experiences, a spirit of humility developed among pastoral ministers (Dries 244).

Another important theme of women’s Catholic mission theology since WWII has been the theme of self-sacrifice. Living with the poor, seeing God’s face in their visage, and being willing to do whatever it takes to follow the mission call cost a number of Latin American missionaries their lives. Maura Clarke, MM and Maureen Courtney, CSA are only two of the women that gave their lives working among the poor in Latin America. Their contributions left us an unforgettable legacy.

Although the number of Catholic missionaries has decreased since the 1970s, the gains made through use of new educational and pastoral care methods are still with us. Women’s influence on educational programs that included anti-racism and equality dimensions, their pastoral work in empowering local communities, and their dedication to the mission task provide cogent tools for mission theology today.

Although gender roles were at issue in many communities and women’s ideas were sometimes not celebrated by the establishment, women’s mission theologies moved ahead in

educational and pastoral formation forums. Before 1960, a theology of the Mystical Body was emphasized, along with an emphasis on world Christianity as it was then defined. Developing curricula that emphasized equality of all peoples had great influence on future Catholic leaders. During the 1960s a horizontal ecclesiology and an option for the poor were at the forefront of women's educational efforts and mission practices. Those contributions by Catholic women to mission theology and methodology stand out as salient as we reflect on mission theology since WWII.

Comparing those contributions to the evangelical women missiologists we see similar themes emerging. Parallels between Christian unity and a theology of the Mystical Body are clear. An emphasis on anti-racism and equality among all peoples can also be traced as similarities, as can promotion of an attitude of humility and a goal of shared leadership. An emphasis on contextualization also runs through both evangelical and Catholic women's mission theologies.

A major difference can be seen in the Catholic women theologians use of a liberation theology methodology that focuses on experience as a field for hearing God's word in community. Evangelical missiologists tend to emphasize the Word first and then the hearing of the Word in community rather than starting with experience and seeing God's word primarily through that lens.

### **Part III: American Society of Missiologist Women Missiologists**

Some of the finest mission theology has been done by women in right here in ASM. Recovering the history of women in mission in both Protestant and Catholic traditions, analyzing theological streams and critiquing mission methods, making theological contributions to the academy and the church, and utilizing insights from social science for mission, and focusing on context and

the needs of local settings are a few of many contributions to mission theology made by ASM women.

Beginning historically, significant mission history has been done by Angie Dries and Dana Robert. Much of that work reclaims the history of women in mission in both Protestant and Catholic realms. In the last section of this paper I outlined some of the theological themes that Angie Dries recounts of Catholic women's mission theology and methods.

On the Protestant side, significant historical recovery of women's theologies of mission has been captured in Dana Robert's *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice*, Mercer University Press, 1997. She documents the rise and fall of the women's missionary movement, highlighting theologies that emphasized the personal and ethical dimensions of mission work, ecumenical cooperation, women's missionary work with women and children, and issues of women's leadership (1997, 409-416). Unfortunately, in mainline denominations, that movement was quelled after WWII, which Robert notes marked "a prelude to foreign missions becoming a lower priority for the (mainline) churches (1997, 306f)."

Looking more broadly at mission history, Robert outlines the major themes of women in mission as service, healing, teaching, and hospitality (2009, 141). She notes that because they were barred from ministerial roles, women missionaries became educators, establishing schools and training girls and women as well as boys and young men that would later become denominational leaders. In so doing, women have left a legacy of educated women and efforts to claim human rights for women all over the world. She describes women's mission method as one of building relationships, a method that not only allowed women access to women of other cultures but kept them from charges of cultural imperialism as they partnered with local

and national leaders to establish hospitals, work for human rights, and educate women for leadership.

With such a legacy, Robert claims that “The history of mission must focus on women for the majority of the Christians in the world are women (2009, 141).” Looking at recent decades, we find that the decline of mission efforts in the mainline churches after WWII is not reflected in the Catholic, Pentecostal, and conservative Protestant traditions. Catholic women in Latin America implemented new forms of mission theology. Conservative Protestant women developed specialized forms of mission, producing Bible translations, Gospel recordings, and the training indigenous pastors (Robert, 1997, xxii). Pentecostalism grew exponentially after the 1960s spawning interest of women in mission in Central and South America. Protestant models of family life brought many into the churches in Latin America and in Africa, views of the missionary as mother played a central role in the spread of the gospel (Robert, 2009, 130f).

Another scholar that has reclaimed part of women’s theological work in mission is Bonnie Sue Lewis. In *Creating Christian Indians: Native Clergy in the Presbyterian Church*, Lewis highlights the productive relationships women missionaries developed with Native American pastors. Despite frequent conflict, women missionaries educated and empowered the elders of Native American congregations to take leadership. Missionary Kate McBeth saw the wisdom of the Nez Perces desire to establish their own churches with Native leadership (Lewis, 119). Part of the appeal of the Christian gospel for Native Americans was its call to the weak and impoverished. Women missionaries reached out to the poor and lowly, practicing hospitality and honoring Native American leaders who had to depend on persuasion to get support for their decisions. Between 1874 and 1932, eighteen men became ordained Presbyterian ministers under the training of women missionaries (Lewis, 121).

Besides reclaiming histories of women in mission, missiologists need to reorient mission theology to benefit from women's experiences and theologies. Robert notes that the majority of Christian missionaries have been women and the majority of Christians in the world today are women (2009, 141). Mission theology by women provides a tremendous resource developing a fitting response to those facts.

Sherron George's theology of mission provides one resource for that reorientation. Post colonial critiques have shown the necessity of working in partnerships with the people that North American missionaries serve. George's *Called as Partners in Christ's Service: The Practice of God's Mission* describes how to develop those partnerships with the 70% of Christians in the two-thirds world. She focuses her theology on the mission of God, a Trinitarian mission that is part of redemption. She first describes God's mission of love and light to the world as portrayed in the Gospel of John. Turning to contemporary missionaries, George stresses attitudes and practices that give Christianity the appeal that inheres in it—compassion, respect for others, humility, and the ability to receive as well as give (George, 60).

As she tells her own story, Sherron George traces a movement that reflects important changes in her mission theology ("From Missionary to Missiologist at the Margins: Three Decades of Transforming Mission" in *Teaching Mission in a Global Context*, Patricia Lloyd-Sidle and Bonnie Sue Lewis, eds. Geneva Press, 2001, 40-53).

Mutuality was her paradigm for mission in the 1970s. She immersed herself in the life and culture of rural congregations in Southwest Brazil (Lloyd-Sidle, 43). During the 1980s she gained a new perspective from her doctoral project—an understanding of solidarity a missional stance (Lloyd-Sidle, 45). In the 1990s, George was called to teach at the IPB Seminary of the South in Campinas. As the first ordained woman to teach at this oldest and largest Presbyterian

seminary in Brazil, George felt herself moving into marginality as a new identity (Lloyd-Sidle, 51). George was transformed by “mission in reverse” during her twenty three years in Brazil. From there she could move to a new attitude, a bold humility. In that attitude she crafted a new definition of mission: “Mission is everything the local-global church is sent into the world to be and do as a participant in God’s mission and every person and gift the local-global church receives in Christ’s name and way”(Lloyd-Sidle, 52).

The work of Marsha Snulligan Haney provides insights into evangelism and Africentric approaches to Christian ministry. Standing in the prophetic tradition of the Black Church, Haney sees God as a liberating relational God interested in all peoples. Firmly rooted in Biblical texts, Haney stresses the importance of addressing contextual challenges in diverse urban settings. That concern has taken her into studies of Protestant/Islamic relations and African American Presbyterians who work in a pluralistic denomination. From the Afrocentric perspective, Haney says “there is no validity to our spirituality if it does not result in social action (Haney, 162).

Unpacking Haney’s substantive mission theology takes us into the middle of urban, pluralistic, and post-colonial contemporary contexts. In telling her own story, Haney speaks of listening, seeking peace, and staying connected to a missionary liberating God (“Development of a New Christian Missiological Identity” in Lloyd-Sidle, 79-92, 79f). Using a pilgrim metaphor for missional identity allows Haney to focus both on the meaning of faith for the individual as well as the structures and systems that need the transforming power of the gospel (Lloyd-Sidle, 89). Unwilling to leave her theology at the level of generalizations, Haney goes on to describe six steps for changing the “traditional, convenient, and familiar patterns of mission defined by paternalism, exclusion, and elitism” into a new paradigm that responds to the “*missio Dei* from the ecclesia of every nation, language, and people group”(Lloyd-Sidle, 91). Those include

understanding the relative nature of truth, centering on ways of being in the context of relationships and affirming diversity in a way that appreciates the gifts of others (Lloyd-Sidle, 91). Haney's thinking and her process in developing a new mission identity offer crucial guideposts to missiologists as we formulate our theologies in a fast-paced world of diversity.

Miriam Adeney, whose work was cited earlier in this paper, brings anthropological insights into play in her theology of mission. Her work is both global and focused on issues in North American contexts. According to Adeney, reaching across cultural boundaries happens everywhere and has always been the Christian's call (Miriam Adeney, 2009, 33) Adeney puts action behind her words by modeling a cross-cultural mission in her practice of teaching writing skills to Christians all over the world. Her stress on unity-in-diversity colors her work with both ecclesiological and egalitarian overtones, which she displays in her work on Muslim women. "Can a single woman who follows Jesus thrive in the Muslim world?" she asks (Miriam Adeney, 2002, 110). Adeney also contributes to the conversations among missiologists with her cogent critique of the compartmentalization in the academic field of missiology as well as in American life (Taylor 384f).

ASM missiologists have made significant contributions to reclaiming the history of women in mission as well as helping us to reorient our current understandings of mission theologies and methods.

#### **Part IV: Salient Themes and Questions**

This whirlwind tour of women's mission theologies barely scratches the surface of the work that women have done and continue to do in mission theology, education, and practice. Identifying a few salient themes provides us with questions and directions for further research.

First, the theme of God's relationality and the claim that places on Christian mission to work in love with others stands out across all of the theologies we have glanced at today. It was also a strong theme in my own study of Christian women in Indonesia as women sought to sustain relationships with women and honor leaders even as they pursued theological education and leadership in the church (Frances Adeney, 2003, 113f). This is not a theme unique to women missiologists, however. But it does pose the question of how women's interpretations of relationships with God and others are unique, and how they are influenced by gender considerations--sociological, ecclesiological, and biological.

Second, the themes of unity, of God's love for all humanity, and of the importance of treating others with respect comes through strongly in much of the women's work in theology we have looked at. Whether couched in terms of compassion, justice, or unity, the focus is on the mission of God in the world as a mission for all peoples, to be carried out through work that shows honor and love to all. As Christian communities reach out to those of other religions, respect becomes a baseline practice for interacting with others in our pluralistic world (Muck, 174). How can missiologists tie together unity-in-diversity, liberating justice for marginalized people, and ecclesial practices of worship and welcome together? Or can we?

Third, the emphasis on Christian values, particularly attitudes of humility and willingness to receive from others as an incarnational witness run through many of the studies. A further emphasis on family values was stressed in some of the work. The questions arising from this focus include parameters of family values as societies change, how humility presents itself in different cultures, and how to become receptive to the gifts that others have to offer. Some of those questions are tackled by George and Haney. I also deal with them in my work on giftive mission and graceful evangelism. But there is much more to be done.

A willingness to express emotions in doing scholarly work presents itself in some of the essays. How much does that willingness relate to social status in the church and academy as women are “given permission” in many societies to express emotion in ways that are discouraged for men? Should women lead in helping missionaries and missiologists to become more willing to engage in dialogue that includes expressions of disappointment and anger as well as joy and celebration? What influence might that have on theologies of mission and their usefulness to the churches?

A final thread that runs through the work of women theologians I have mentioned today is that of listening. Listening to third world voices, listening to the marginalized, listening with the intent to respond in love, listening to learn, listening to honor others different from ourselves. Becoming open enough to actually listen to someone that has radically different views from one’s own is a task that takes conscious effort to achieve (Frances Adeney, 2009, 166) So here we confront a final question that is not only a research question but also a personal one.

I began this paper with a story of Rev. Carol Rose Ikler and I’d like to close with a reference to her. Doing theology is an everyday practice for Rev. Ikler. She can’t imagine going a day without reflecting on the work of God in the world and how Christians can be involved in it. Doing this in an academic setting was a new adventure for women in the 1950s and ‘60s. Today it is commonplace. Can we utilize that practice of women seminarians, pastors, counselors, and missiologists to a better end than we have in the past? Can we listen?

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