

**Justice for All or Justice for None?**  
**Review of Plenary 2006 UMW Assembly Speakers**  
**Wahu Kaara and Silvia Regina de Lima Silva**  
**By Katy Kiser, Research Analyst, RENEW Network**

Isaiah 58:6-12 was chosen by the 2006 Assembly as the primary scripture focus. This is the well-known passage where the Lord tells us that our healing and righteousness will come as we “loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke.” We are told to minister to our own families as well as the poor and oppressed. What a powerful passage! On a personal and societal level, we are called to take care but then look beyond ourselves and find meaning and blessing in meeting the needs of others. This is a message that all United Methodists, indeed all Christians, can and should embrace. The question becomes HOW this is to be accomplished in answer to the fundamental question of WHY oppression exists in the first place.

For the Women’s Division and their keynote speaker Wahu Kaara this mandate of the Lord’s means that we should “*rethink our covenant with our creator.*”<sup>i</sup> In rethinking this covenant, we should reinterpret what Isaiah means when he tells us we will repair broken walls. On one hand, this rethinking means that we must tear down walls or in Kaara’s words, “*the exigencies of the dominant human made enclosures.*”<sup>ii</sup> On the other hand, it means that we should embrace diversity which she claims is the fundamental strength of our civilization.

Kaara tells the women that the walls of injustice are those put up by “destructive competition”<sup>iii</sup> or in other words the capitalist system and democracy. She promotes the idea that those who live in free societies—free from relative want—are responsible for the poverty and injustice found in third world countries like her own. Kaara’s misguided view of the world is one that embraces the idea that global economic systems are predicated on the poverty of people in less developed countries. She blames colonialism for Africa’s problems and inability to provide basic services like water, land, education and health care.

She lays no indictment at the door of repressive regimes or governments where the principles of democracy are sorely lacking. For her, profit is evil. The very mechanisms that have provided most effectively for the material needs of humanity are the source of the problem for Kaara. She has long been an advocate for the cancellation of third world debt and chides Africa's ruling class for yoking itself with fiscal self-discipline

Kaara does not acknowledge that her own continent of Africa has been the recipient of trillions of dollars from the UN and free countries like the U.S. over the years. Sadly, despite the funding, poverty has escalated not abated. This was all too evident last summer at the G8 meeting in Scotland.

Karaa tells the people of Africa and United Methodist Women that developed countries only reach out to Africa for profit and to plunder. In truth, the problem is not that some have and their very possession oppresses those who have not. Nor is the problem one that enough money and sacrifice would solve. The problem is the very systems which perpetuate the injustice are the systems protected by her notion of diversity.

At the heart of Kaara's woeful misperceptions is her limited understanding of sin. In her words, "*subjugation, servitude, domination and control is sin and is unacceptable.*"<sup>iv</sup> Thus for her, war is always a matter of those with power subjugating, controlling and dominating those of lesser power or those lesser countries who have the resources needed by the power hungry. She ignores the notion of "just war" and the fact that sometimes what is truly unjust is to allow oppressive regimes to perpetrate crimes on humanity. She indulges in class warfare rather than look to constructive ways of solving the problems of poor countries in Africa. Kaara represents the tired failed ideology of the liberation theologians and the communist system.

## Let Us Bring Down the Walls

Also bringing a study on Isaiah 58:6-12 was Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, a Catholic theologian from Brazil. De Lima Silva introduces a new word—"femicide" which she uses to describe the violence faced by women around the world. "This term must be introduced to the vocabulary of people and brought to the attention of the media,"<sup>v</sup> she said. De Lima Silva does not shrink from identifying herself with radical and extreme feminism. In the conference, *Concilium 2000/5; In the Power of Wisdom* de Lima Silva joins her voice with others who "*probe the possibilities for articulating a political Wisdom spirituality that sustains rather than mutes struggles for survival and liberation.*"<sup>vi</sup> This spirituality centers on issues of sacred power and justice in a global context often calling on the Chokma Sophia Wisdom embraced by the controversial now debunked Re-Imagining conferences of the 90's.

De Lima Silva is best known for championing the retelling of African slavery in Brazil. This retelling claims that colonial powers imposed Christianity on slaves and denied them "*Black traditional religious expression.*"

*We believe that it is for this the effort of the Afro community is in the process of historical recuperation, theological reconstruction, re-reading of the Bible and announcement of a God who survived, together with the people in the process of denial and extermination of the African identity and culture.*<sup>vii</sup>

For de Lima Silva God is incarnate in all religions. She sees the Christian belief in Jesus, the only son of God as just one incarnation.

*Acknowledging the liberating presence of God in the different religious expressions must be accompanied by the acknowledgement of the differences present in each of them...In this sense, in Brazil and all Latin America and the Caribbean, the Christian God is invited to sit at the table to talk with other gods on an equal basis.*<sup>viii</sup>

For de Lima Silva Christ's incarnation is only valuable as it identifies with oppressed people who have been "crucified" on the altars of Christian mission.

*In many of our churches, mission was marked by a Christocentrism that justified invasion, death, human sacrifice in the name of the faith in God. Thinking of the mission from the presence and activity of the Holy Ghost and from a Christology centered on those crucified on Earth enables us to be able to talk more openly about other religious expressions.*<sup>ix</sup>

It is with this mind set the de Lima Silva interprets the Isaiah 58 passage stripping it of its traditional interpretation and using it to indict those who would divide “*human beings and nations into good and evil, and is creating enemies and fabricating wars.*”<sup>x</sup> She sees all “walls” even legitimate qualifications for immigration as a “*manifestation of a growing racism and xenophobia which are becoming a part of everyday life.*”<sup>xi</sup>

De Lima Silva quotes the first verse of Isaiah 58. Here God tells Isaiah to tell the house of Jacob they are a rebellious people who have sinned and turned from Him. But, she does not mean they have sinned in turning from the one true God; she means they have sinned in seeing themselves as the true inhabitants of the land. They have sinned as, “*they sought to separate themselves from anyone and everyone they considered impure* (Hag.2:10-14).” To de Lima Silva, their sin is excluding foreigners and a lack of commitment to “diversity.”

For de Lima Silva, the Israelites’ sin does not stop here. Theirs is the sin of slavery and exploitation:

*There were new social inequalities. A system of taxation gave way to the system of slavery. In the society of Isaiah’s time, the exploitation of brother by brother emerged. The recently arrived considered themselves the true Israel and pretended to lay claim to ancestral properties.*<sup>xii</sup>

Much of de Lima Silva’s address to the United Methodist Women was not only a denunciation of those in this country who would address the real problem of illegal immigration reform, but it was also an indictment of the wall erected by Israel to stop Palestinian terrorist. This wall which is so denounced by de Lima Silva and the Women’s Division is the same wall which since its construction, has decreased terrorist attacks by fifty percent. This same wall has reduced fatal suicide bombings by over seventy percent.<sup>xiii</sup> The real reduction in the loss of human life to terrorist acts is not celebrated. That is because true justice is not the goal. The goal of these women is the acceptance of all beliefs—even ancient pagan beliefs.

The passages taken from Isaiah 58 should be taken seriously by all Christians. But, both plenary speakers, Wahu Kaara and Silvia Regina de Lima Silva offer the women of the church little more than a misinformed sentimental appeal of Justice for all people. These women represent a radical extreme ideology that seeks to blame the ills of our world not on sin but on the successful institutions including Christianity and free democracies like our own. They offer us fuzzy notions of “diversity” and go so far as to advocate we appreciate primitive cultures and belief in non-existent gods that breed real injustice—not to mention the acceptance of that which will take civilization backwards not forward. How sad the Women’s Division gives voice to such nonsense.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umw/>; Justice for All! Our Only Way Out!; Wahu Kaara; 2006 Assembly, Anaheim, California

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid*

<sup>v</sup> <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umw/>; *Let Us Bring down the Walls and Open Pathways Towards a Culture of Compassion and Caring*; Silvia Regina de Lima Silva; 2006 Assembly, Anaheim, California.

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vi <http://www.concilium.org/>

vii <http://www.sedos.org/english/silvia.htm> *Mission and Afro-Brazilian Cultural Reality*; Silvia Regina de Lima Silva.

viii *ibid*

ix *ibid*

x <http://new.gbgn-umc.org/umw/>; *Let Us Bring down the Walls and Open Pathways Towards a Culture of Compassion and Caring*; Silvia Regina de Lima Silva; 2006 Assembly, Anaheim, California.

xi *ibid*

xii *ibid*

xiii *Faith and Freedom*; Fall 2005; Vol. 24 No. 4; *Pro-Palestinian Christian Organization Neglects Israel's Need for Security*; Steve Rempe