

Getting the Crucified Woman to Emmanuel College was truly a collaborative enterprise. I wish to acknowledge friends and former colleagues who are here today, especially Jo Aitken and Beth Robinson of the Arts Committee at Bloor Street Church. Karl Jaffary was chair of the Worship Committee in 1978 when the Reverend Cliff Elliott envisioned a more intentional involvement of the arts in the life of the congregation. None of us could have known what that would mean.

At Emmanuel College, Douglas Jay, principal during the 1980s accepted the gift of the sculpture after chairing many acrimonious meetings, and he oversaw its installation in its present location. Joan Wyatt, chairing this meeting, was the liturgist for the installation service on May 10, 1986, and was a student here during the years of controversy. Catherine Evans, my daughter, also a graduate of Emmanuel College, was married in Bloor Street while the sculpture was there. She frequently spoke to groups of people who visited the sculpture at Emmanuel and wanted to know its story. She will be here tomorrow.

Cliff Elliott, who died in 2006, and Doug Jay who is here tonight took the brunt of the anger and hatred expressed by those who objected to *Crucified Woman*. I want to say in this context that along with a group of courageous and strong-minded women there were thoughtful and caring men. The story is collaborative in all of its acrimony, controversy and celebration.

Bloor Street already had a history of relating art to the worship and educational ministry of the church, especially music and liturgical dance. Some of the first ventures of the new committee were showings of paintings in the large room adjacent to the nave with the artist present at the coffee hour. On Remembrance Day, Timothy Findley read from his novel *The Wars*. The Toronto Dance Theatre choreographed an anti-war dance. In this context, the story of the Crucified Woman began at a meeting of the committee where Jo Aitken told us about the sculpture and the artist, Almuth Lutkenhaus. In early spring, 1979, Jo, Beth, Cliff and I went to Burlington to meet the artist and to see the sculpture at her home. She told us that she wanted to portray suffering, and crucifixion was to her a powerful symbol of suffering.

There was no cross. She said artists just work and think about meanings afterwards. She did the body of a woman because she was a woman. We all agreed that we should have this sculpture at the church during Lent, Holy Week and Easter, and so began many meetings and discussions. The sculpture arrived early in April and was placed near the back of the nave during the week preceding Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday, the *Toronto Star* had a front page coloured photo of Cliff and the sculpture with headlines, "Nude Sculpture Greets Congregation". The church immediately began to receive phone calls and letters expressing hurt, anger, exasperation and threats. But comments from the congregation recorded in a book for that purpose were running eleven to one in favour of the sculpture and the sculpture was placed in the chancel. The Good Friday service at

Bloor Street along with Trinity-St. Paul's, focussed on the suffering of women. The offering was given to assist Battered Wives, an ecumenical agency.

The sculpture was still in the chancel on Easter Sunday, hanging just below the cross on the dorsal curtain. The church was filled to capacity, and there was an air of expectancy. A few minutes into the service, Peggy Baker was dancing, accompanied by a brass quintet playing "Crown Him with many crowns". Margaret Zeidman, the soprano-soloist sang "I know that my Redeemer liveth". Cliff seemed to have extra compassion, wisdom, honesty, humility and good news in this celebration of the Easter faith. There was a high level of enthusiasm and energy in the congregation. Someone said that Easter had a different feeling. There was lively discussion at the coffee hours where groups of two, three, four, five people talked about their understandings of crucifixion, resurrection, Protestantism, "holy space", the meaning of chancel, nave, narthex, art, sculpture, crucifix, empty cross, idolatry, heresy, Christian feminism, suffering, redemption, Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Most of the criticism came from people who had not seen the sculpture. The sculpture was returned to the artist at the end of April and four years later she offered it as a gift to Emmanuel.

Universities do not make hasty decisions. It took three years of contentious discussion; agreement did not come easily. Universities encourage people to look at every point of view. Faculty and students met formally and informally, but the final recommendation had to be made by the Victoria Senate Art Committee.

In October of 1984 Professor David Blodstein, chair of the Victoria University Senate Art Committee, provided the committee's rationale and its recommendation. It was pointed out that although any gift or purchase of art is the property of the University, Ms. Lutkenhaus's gift was specifically offered to Emmanuel College. Since artistic merit is not an absolute, social, political, ethical or religious connotations may all have a proper place in aesthetic judgement. Certainly, it is unlikely that the association of a figure in cruciform could be detached from 2,000 years of cultural heritage... The members of the Senate Art Committee have separately and together, come to a conclusion... that the value of the Crucified Woman – its aesthetic value – seems to increase the closer its context is to a religious one. Even those members who would object fairly strenuously to its location anywhere else on the Victoria University campus, find the donor's proposed setting, Emmanuel College, to be appropriate. The Senate Art Committee therefore found *Crucified Woman* aesthetically acceptable for location at Emmanuel College, if the college so desires. Doug Jay monitored the contentious theological arguments that followed. The location became an integral part of the decision, so that the location was decided first and then the decision was made to accept the gift and proceed with the installation. Money had been given to bronze the sculpture for an outside location where it now stands.

Victoria University gardener, Peter Hooiveld, liked the sculpture very much and prepared for its installation by having a dying tree removed and three new silver birches planted. When he retired, his co-workers presented him with a painting of his favourite sculpture garden. The security staff like *Crucified Woman* and they also knew the tendencies of

male university students: the sculpture was well-lighted and security came regularly at party-times! At the Emmanuel College graduation ceremonies in 1990, Robert Dalgeish, the student valedictorian said, “How could we have appreciated what we might learn from a scared and suffering, yet hauntingly beautiful young woman, who stands mutely in the courtyard, flowers wilting at her feet, a silent memorial?”

Theology flourished. Deep theology is not literal stuff, and many students found deeper meanings of betrayal and abandonment, love, death and resurrection. In the seventies the second wave of feminism was influencing universities and churches. Journals and publishing houses began to require inclusive language. Theology had spoken of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but now the centrality of Sarah was recognized. By the eighties when the sculpture came to Emmanuel, feminist theologians were realizing that both Sarah and Hagar shaped and challenged the faith story. Hagar was one of the first women in scripture to experience use, abuse and rejection. Rejected women find their stories in Hagar. As a faithful maid she is exploited, she is the woman of colour used by Abraham and abused by Sarah who is of the ruling class. Hagar is the illegal immigrant, the poor outsider carrying bread and water, the other woman. Awareness emerged that in race and class as well as gender, women suffer. Homelessness, violence, poverty, and sexual abuse claim women’s lives.

In June, 1988, women came here from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, the Caribbean and North America to the first global conference of women in inter-faith dialogue. Toronto was known to the World Council of Churches as a city that had a lively inter-faith dialogue. Emmanuel College was the venue and many of our conversations, whether passionate or perfunctory, were held in the sculpture garden. Each day there was an opportunity to be a participant-observer in ritual acts as varied as Hindu puja, Muslim prayer, Buddhist meditation, Wiccan incantation, Christian worship, Native North American spiritual practice and a Jewish Sabbath meal. Many religions have dietary rules at their centre, but it is traditionally women who prepare and serve food. A young Jewish woman told me that a rabbi had said that having female rabbis was as unlikely as an orange on the Seder plate – so oranges appeared! In patriarchal religions, men make the rules but women prepare the food. Women from other faith traditions knew that the Crucified Woman connected the suffering of women with a central Christian symbol. For our farewell ritual we joined hands in a circle, and moved and danced around *Crucified Woman*.

In Emmanuel College’s required introductory course, Church and Ministry, a valuable section involved visiting mosques, synagogues, temples and learning about other local and world religions from rabbis, imams and designated persons. We tried to have women from other traditions speak to us.

Margaret Lawrence reminded me to re-read her short story, “The Merchant of Heaven”, written while she was living in Africa. The story is set in a village in Ghana and tells about the efforts of a new missionary, Brother Lemon, who claimed that his business was with the salvation of their immortal souls, and was certain that that was the greatest kindness he could do these people. He was in a hurry; he wanted a thousand souls within

six months. Danso, an artist, imagined him tearing the soul out of a living body and throwing away the flesh like the rind of a fruit. But Danso agreed to paint a picture for the new church. “It was a picture of the Nazarene... with the body of a fisherman or a carpenter. He was well-built. He had strong wrists and arms. His eyes were capable of laughter.” And he was African. The white missionary “sagged as though he had been struck and – yes – hurt. The old gods he could fight... but this was a threat he had never anticipated... Do many – do all of you see him like that? He didn’t wait for an answer”.

A crucified woman is found in American literature and she is Jewish. In Chaim Potok’s novel, *My Name is Asher Lev*, a young orthodox Jewish boy passionately studies art in opposition to his upbringing and his father’s intentions for him. His teacher said, “I am not telling you to paint crucifixions. I am telling you that you must understand what a crucifixion is in art if you want to be a great artist.” Finally he painted the anguish and torment of crucifixion. There was no cross there either, but rather a venetian blind. “I drew my mother in her housecoat, with her arms extended along the horizontal of the blind, her wrists tied to it with the cords of the blind, her legs tied at the ankles... I arched her body and twisted her head. I drew my father standing to her right, dressed in a hat and coat and carrying an attaché case. I drew myself standing to her left, dressed in paint-splattered clothes and a fisherman’s cap and holding a palette and a long spear-like brush... For all the pain you suffered my mama... For all the anguish this picture of pain will cause you... For the unspeakable mystery that brings good fathers and sons into the world and lets a mother watch them tear at each other’s throats. For the Master of the Universe, whose suffering world I do not comprehend.” Asher Lev’s “Brooklyn Crucifixion” caused great pain to his family and synagogue. But his teacher said, “Be a great painter, Asher Lev. That will be the only justification for all the pain your art will cause.” Art is creation and hope.

Ways of knowing in art and knowing in theology are very similar. Both require the participation of the community. The sculpture provided the opportunity for many people to find the words for the saving story. To do theology means to listen as well as talk and write. The willing participation of so many people in responding to the sculpture depended on the nature of artistic expression. Religious art carries with it a particular norm. Its value is not only aesthetic; rather it has value through its relationship with a community and the meaning that it evokes within that community.

Works of art evoke creative response: conflict, ambiguity and anguish are expressed in the responses because they are expressed in the sculpture. The creative imagination knows that change comes in the context of conflict. Artists trust their own insight and are unwilling to submit to rigid control; but they are also able to recognize and respect differences. To be understood is more important than to be agreed with – in both theology and art. In telling this story, and in using the responses of many people, there is an affirmation of art as a way of doing theology.

Some theologians made the point that women suffer as victims, but Jesus was not a victim. He chose to go to the cross. The garden of Gethsemane story, if interpreted literally, says that Jesus acted in obedience to God. Possibly Jesus could have escaped but

he did not. And many women could have escaped, but they did not because of the way they understood God's will. Dorothy Soelle in her book *Suffering* tells the story of a woman who lives in a Catholic village in Austria. The woman stays on and on in a marriage, although the relationship with her husband is intolerable. He beats her physically, tortures her mentally, humiliates her, scorns her, and maligns her before friends and family. She endures this hell, but as she walks beside the river, she wishes she were lying in it. She wonders about suicide, but she cannot do that because of the children. She cannot consider divorce. Her neighbours are outraged by the way her husband treats her, but everyone in the village, including the woman herself, is caught in some notion of the omnipotence of God, a notion that everything that happens is God's will, a pietistic fatalism that leads to a numbing acceptance of suffering. She could have escaped, but she understood her suffering to be God's will.

The suffering of women is both personal and political. Changing the structures that cause poverty, hunger and marginalization is the first step in caring for women and children who are so overly represented in the lowest income categories. A young Scandinavian woman, Dora Maria Tellez, who worked underground for the overthrow of Nicaragua's dictator in 1979, had been a medical student. In a book she tells about the first time she assisted at the birth of a baby as a story of cooperation with nature in bringing a new person into the world. She knew that what she was doing was important work. As the woman moaned and pushed, the baby's head appeared. Dora knew that she was the baby's first contact with the world. Her hands trembled and she felt tired, but she knew that poverty, if not outright misery, awaited this baby. She knew that she had not completed her work by aiding his birth. She must work to give birth to a new and different world, which like every birth will be painful and joyous.

A violent assault made headlines around the world on December 6, 1989, when fourteen young women, engineering students, were shot to death at the *École Polytechnique* in Montreal. The killer, who also killed himself, blamed feminists for the misfortunes of his life. Some people described the Montreal massacre as an isolated incident, the act of a madman. However, Ursula Franklin, Professor Emerita of the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering at the University of Toronto, addressed that understanding. She said, "Yes... but it is not unrelated to what is going on around us. That people get mad may happen in any society, any place, every place. But how people get mad, how that escalation from prejudice to hate to violence occurs, what and who is hated, how it is expressed, is not unrelated to the world around us. When a madman uses easily available weapons and easily available prejudices, it is not totally his problem that will go away when he goes away." Memorial services were held all across Canada. In Toronto, the Crucified Woman was the place where about five hundred women and men gathered and met together in that mixture of grief, anger, sorrow, rage and mourning. Several people brought flowers. One journalist described the location as "around an unbearably poignant sculpture of a naked crucified woman". It was a bitterly cold day, the sculpture starkly visible, no longer surrounded by the green leaves of the birches in spring, nor the deep golden leaves of autumn.

My book, *Crucified Woman*, was published in 1991. It contains many of the words that people wrote in a book provided for reflection. Consensual validation, knowing that other people have the same thoughts and feelings that you have is empowering for many people. One woman said: "When I was looking at the sculpture, I met another woman there and we started talking about it. I didn't know what to say but she really liked it. I learned a lot from her. Most of all, I decided that if she can talk like that, I can too." And some men were surprised that women felt the way they did. Language, if it is to help the mind connect with actual experience and thus enable creativity to flourish, must be our own. Finding the words to say what we mean is not only the work of toddlers and patients in a psychiatrist's office but the work of every human being. Why do we make it hard for one another? Has traditional theological language, understood literally, made it difficult for us to know or to say what we believe? One woman wrote: "I keep looking at that naked body and I don't know what I should be thinking... I don't know what words to use... Tears came to my eyes. So many people in the church are upset about it. But I feel peaceful and clean, or healed, less burdened. Although I'm really quite an old woman, I feel new. I wonder if that's what people mean when they say they've been born again? I've never talked to anyone in the church about God, or about myself either, especially not about my body."

I look forward to hearing what we will say about the Crucified Woman this weekend and in the future. Do we have a new language? I have told the story as a story of change and growth in the faith. How will the story continue?