

REFORMED WORLD

VOLUME 66, NO.2



World Communion
of Reformed Churches



**World Communion
of Reformed Churches**

The Catholic Presbyterian (1879-1883), The Quarterly Register (1886-1936), The Presbyterian Register (1937-1948), The Presbyterian World (1949-1955), The Reformed and Presbyterian World (1956-1970), Reformed World (1971-) Volume 66 (2) • ISSN 0034-3056

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REFORMED WORLD is published by the World Communion of Reformed Churches, www.wcrc.ch.

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Editorial

The twenty-sixth General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches will be held between 29 June and 7 July 2017 in Leipzig, Germany. The theme of this General Council—"Living God, Renew and Transform Us"—reflects not only on WCRC's heritage but also centres the Council around the God of Life and calls us to renew the Church and ourselves so that the world can be transformed.

This issue of *Reformed World* will focus on Gender Justice, one of the issues that will come before the General Council. The desk of Justice and Partnership at the WCRC strives to bring equality between women and men in church and society and through its programmes enables churches to work for the transformation of gender relations and partnership.

This issue of the *Reformed World* is a rich collection of essays spanning the many complexities of Gender Justice. The introductory foreword by Dora Arce-Valentin, the Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, is a foundational essay laying out the framework for the WCRC's commitment to gender justice. Jane Douglass' and HyeRan Kim-Cragg's essays focus on the issue of women's ordination bringing together Reformed theology and gender justice. Phillip Peacock in his essay on *Imago Dei* gives us insights into the present context of practicing justice. In a Bible study, Claudia Tron engages in the challenges of life and mission of the Church, writing on the lived experience of gender-based violence. Amritha Perumalla's essay situates gender through the concepts of intersectionality, subalternity, and the Accra Confession. Sharath Souseelya's piece addresses the female body as a site of violence and the need for a paradigm shift.

This issue also has two articles written by recipients of the Theological Education Scholarship Fund for Women, a programme of the Justice Desk. Rajakumari Talapati's article looks at the impact of Globalization on Dalit Women in India, and Rose Mary's article gives us insight to gender justice in the Mara Community.

As tribute to the work and life of Lilly Phiri, a young and inspiring Reformed theologian who passed away last year, this issue includes her essay for our General Council's *Prayerful Preparation* book: "Renew and Transform Reformed Theology."

The Executive Committee of the WCRC that met in Havana, Cuba, in May 2016, committed itself to the issue of women's ordination. In the appendix to this issue, you will find the draft declaration of faith on women's ordination.

We trust you will find these essays thought provoking and insightful. We welcome your responses and comments (reformed.world@wrcr.eu).

The Reformed World Editorial Team



Foreword

Dora Arce-Valentin
Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership
World Communion of Reformed Churches

This edition of *Reformed World* is completely dedicated to a theme area that has been part of the programme emphasis of the World Communion of Reformed Churches since its inception at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids in 2010, as well as a theme area for one of the founding groups, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The themes and content of the wide range of issues are brought together under the general topic of Gender Justice¹ —of course there is much more than what can be included in this edition of *Reformed World*. Nevertheless, we are very pleased to present this compilation of articles, which come from almost all the regions that make up our global WCRC family. There are different entry points into the discussion and a splendid range of approaches to the fundamental themes as they relate to the work of the WCRC in the field of gender justice.

Why address the theme of justice from the gender perspective?

This was the statement to delegates at the United General Council in the report of the Gender Justice: “Gender justice is an ongoing journey of praying together, engaging, challenging, always seeking discernment on how God wants us to live as women and men. It involves finding and putting into practice new ways to express and live out the uniqueness of bearing the image of God, fulfilling our responsibility of building and nurturing right, just and equal relationships between women, men and the earth.”²

In that same report the members of the Gender Justice Group cited milestones from our journey from the WARC Assemblies in Seoul (1989), Debrecen (1997), and Accra (2004), which were affirmed in Grand Rapids (2010). Our certainty that the Spirit guided this path is confirmed by the many new initiatives that have been taken to confront patriarchy, not only as an ideology, but also in the churches, where patriarchy has been so comfortably installed in church institutions in so many forms and expressions for so long. Attention has now

¹ In general we use the term “gender” to identify social and cultural constructions of what is to be a man or a woman, in contrast to biological differences or sex.

² Record of Proceedings of the Uniting General Council, Grand Rapids, 2010. Section Report on Gender Justice. Appendix 17, pg. 157.

been drawn to the fact of the exclusion of women from leadership positions, which is one of the expressions of this patriarchal hegemony in the churches.

The need to identify and denounce patriarchal ideology in all its scope and forms was heightened. This not only accentuated an increased active participation of women in decision-making in ecumenical spaces, but also highlighted the interrelationships between all forms of exclusion, the systemic nature of exclusion and its links to violence, because violence is understood as the product of asymmetrical relationships. The delegates in Grand Rapids also strongly affirmed the necessity for us to stop reducing gender analysis to “women’s issues,” and to focus our efforts on the theme of power relationships and the urgent need to reconfigure our concepts and practices regarding masculine hegemony, to promote just relationships.

And because we have been so keenly aware of the many challenges implicit in the decision to become a **Communion committed to justice**, those same themes linked to the quest for just and equal relationships between men and women and the earth have become a substantial part of the key theme areas for the program work of the WCRC. These were bold decisions taken in Grand Rapids; they took many member churches and their leaders outside their “comfort zones.” Taking these decisions sealed our commitment to the prophetic calling to which we have been summoned by the power of the Spirit. Taking these decisions confirmed our intention to work towards becoming a great global family, linked in the most fundamental way by our quest for justice and its partner peace.

Some of these decisions, those that perhaps had the greatest impact and transcendence, are the following³:

- To amend the WCRC Constitution to require that not only must there be equal representation (50% - 50%) of lay and ordained delegates, but also equal representation of men and women delegates; encouraging member churches to take on greater responsibility for gender justice work through their own programs, and to hold firm in their commitment expressed in the Accra Confession: to focus on the ways in which gender justice relates to economic justice, ecological justice, and social exclusion.
- To promote the ordination of women, and to work towards the moment when ordination of women will be binding and mandatory for (all members of) the Communion.

³ Record of Proceedings of the Uniting General Council, Grand Rapids, 2010.



- To continue to actively support and accompany theological training for women, especially for young women and especially those who seek ordination to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. Funds designated for theological education are used to further this goal (Theological Education Scholarship Fund for Women in the South).

With reference to these decisions, it is significant that at this time as we are preparing this edition of *Reformed World* we are also in the final process of registering delegates for General Council 2017 in Leipzig. The details of the representation of our global family are slowly taking shape, and we are grateful to see the results of the intense and fruitful dialogue with the member churches around the process of the nomination of delegates in accordance with the decisions taken as to representation. We can see that the equal representation to which we committed in the founding General Council is taking shape. We give thanks to God for each of the churches and leaders who have accepted the challenge to work to comply with the agreements made in Grand Rapids. As we have worked on this we have also come to understand how far we have to go to achieve a true Communion of equals, recognizing that all the member churches are part of the body of Christ, in which “indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.” (1 Corinthians 12:14)

We are more and more aware that the themes we work with under the so-called Justice and Partnership Programme are intertwined in multiple, diverse, and sometimes unequal ways. This requires us to approach them with a holistic perspective. This also means that we must recognize not only the various interrelationships but the “whole” of which they are part. While we must not lose sight of the common systemic origin of the problems we address in this programmatic area, it is also important to acknowledge with humility and in repentance the many ways when churches at the institutional level, and the theologies they produce and reproduce, have legitimized and replicated the sorts of oppression we seek to expose. In many ways and very often they have legitimized the asymmetrical power structures which in turn generate every sort of violence.

Even with all this activity, we are very conscious of how much we still need to do as we continue on the path towards a true Communion, as we work for real mutuality in the programmatic content we propose, affirm, and implement. In order to do that we should recognize that theology/ies are the tools that the churches reckon with to facilitate the necessary exercise in order to look at

themselves critically, to “reprocess” and “repurpose” the content of its mission, and to use those insights to dialectically contemplate on the content of its theological reflection. Then, the fundamental content of the mission is precisely this: As we churches walk through our pilgrimage through history, we construct that community of women and men who seek to redeem and renew themselves as a part of the divine creation, as we continue to work for justice. As one of the contributors to this edition of *Reformed World* has expressed it: “[Rather] only the whole of humanity together can claim that they are in the image of God together.”⁴

This means that justice must be at the core of our work because it is not possible to arrive at a true communion “in the image of God” without the inclusion of all of us. It is not possible unless we deconstruct the asymmetries of power, unless we dismantle all the many manifestations of patriarchy. Unless we give a place and a voice to all those who have been tossed aside, those who have endured scandalous levels of poverty and inequity throughout history, locked in their suffering because of conflicts created by political, economic, and financial systems built on the accumulation of wealth and destruction of the environment for the benefit of a privileged elite. We must keep on in our efforts to be faithful to what was expressed in the Accra Confession, that as churches: “...**We reject any form of injustice which destroys right relations (because of) gender, race, class, disability or caste...**” (Accra Confession, Article 27)

Our prophetic testimony that validates us as faithful churches to our Christian faith expressed in a Reformed tradition, is completely dependent on our courage to reaffirm, as a global family, that we truly want to work for being a communion committed to justice. This faith that ties us in heart and spirit could be only the result of our struggles for justice. This struggle which creates human beings who are risk-takers, that creates faith communities that do not stop to count the costs they may incur because of their steadfast commitment to mission, communities which want to be part of a family—a family that is brave and bold, confident and free.

This is the legacy we have from those who led the Reformation movement and its predecessor movements, during the convulsive times (in Europe) when it was their responsibility to bear witness to their faith. They discerned the will of God as revealed in their various contexts; they tried to understand what they should do to fulfill God’s plan for their time, they offered themselves to cooperate with

⁴ Peacock, Phillip Vinod, “Some Insights on Imago Dei in the Light of our Present Context,” *Reformed World*, March 2017.



God in God's purpose of liberation and redemption. This is the same brave and honest faith that made possible the Barmen Confession, the Belhar Confession, and the Accra Confession, just three of many examples of faithful actions.

What can we expect to find in this edition of *Reformed World*?

This collection of articles tries to affirm all the above. It brings together experiences, knowledge, and realities that speak to the church today and become for us a historical place from where God wants us to discern his will in the search for justice.

The organizing team for the Women's Pre-Council that will be held prior to the next General Council made a decision to return to the theme of gender violence, using the theme: "Living God, in this world of violence, renew and transform us." Various articles in this edition of *Reformed World* address this theme. Our understanding of the meaning of gender-based violence conforms to the definition established by the United Nations. This underlines that any person can be the victim of violence, but that gender becomes one of the factors, which significantly increases vulnerability.

"Violence against women occurs in a patriarchal cultural context. The control and submission of women by men has traditionally not only been tolerated but also legitimized. This is structural violence, and it arises from a series of socio-cultural norms, which both justify and downplay the significance of this type of conduct. In short, gender-based violence has its roots in the inequality between men and women. It is instrumental in character: it is not an end in itself but rather an instrument of domination and control. We are speaking here about a type of violence which is not individual in its origins, nor in its consequences, but which does certainly result in individual acts of aggression."⁵

Lastly, we are pleased to annex to this issue that is especially dedicated to the theme of gender justice, the draft of the "Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women." This document will be presented to the delegates of the General Council as a proposal to be adopted after fruitful dialogue. That is why several articles of this issue also bring from the historical, the biblical, and theological, reflections of an issue that has undoubtedly been a great challenge for many churches in our global family. The authors approach the theme from several

⁵ Taken from a report on violence against women in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Special Report from the Ararteko institution to the Basque Parliament, December 2003.

points of entry with the conviction that it emerges within the perspective of gender justice and the challenges of achieving not only equity but the inclusion and empowerment of women in the institutional Church structures attuned to the Reformed tradition.

We, then, approach this important theme taking into consideration that the right of women to be commissioned as ministers of the Word and Sacraments is only a piece in the whole matter. Nevertheless, we recognize it as a very important one. As it is written in the book *Walk My Sister* (WARC, 1993) and its introductory chapter, "A New Community: Affirmations of the Ordination of Women": "The Reformed tradition particularly underlines the universal priesthood of all believers. Each member should have the opportunity and freedom to serve with her or his special gifts."⁶

Later, the same article points: "The inclusive concept of ordination points to Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Ordination is not an end in itself but rather a process, which witnesses to reconciliation. The ordination of women and men witnesses to the gifts of God, which are present in the entire body of Christ. Ordination does not endow a person with any particular grace, which elevates her or him above the community of faith. Against our expectations and by the sheer grace of God we are all called to use our gifts in Christ's ministry"⁷. So, as we approach women ordination as a matter of gender justice we affirm that we are working for a church that takes seriously the very roots of our Reformed traditions. We also recognize the ecclesiological dimension of this matter since we should be more emphatic in promoting an alternative model to a church in which the patriarchal-hierarchical model is currently so fashionable even among our Reformed Churches, could be replaced for an inclusive community of all believers as Acts 2:43-47 reminds us.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all those who offered to collaborate with us in the preparation of this edition of *Reformed World* and we also thank the Reformed World Editorial Board, which gave us this opportunity to share these reflections and stories regarding one of the fundamental priorities for justice work in WCRC, and which all come from WCRC member churches in their many contexts

Today, perhaps more than ever in human history, a global family such as ours, one which affirms its commitment to justice, which is determined to seek its

⁶ Ursel Rosenhäger and Sarah Stephens, (Editors) "Walk my sister" *The Ordination of Women: Reformed Perspective*, WARC, 1993. p. 5.

⁷ *Idem.* p.7.



own sense of true communion; this family has unique opportunity to contribute to the healing of a Creation devastated by wars, by economic and financial structures that prefer to “save” banks rather than human beings, by ideologies and systems of domination which favor the few and deny to the vast majority of people the fundamental rights of every human being: a life of dignity, lived in harmony with the rest of the Creation.

In a world in which those who hold economic power now are not only linked to those with political power but actually hold power. We live in a world in which fundamentalisms of every sort flourish, in which these (ideologies) co-opt our discourse, our governments, our religious institutions, our theologies. In this world our communion affirms that it is a global family, and throws its lot in with those who Jesus called “the least of these.” When our Communion seeks justice as a fundamental bond and value of our faith that will be our most authentic and honest witness to our faith.

In the words of the Accra Confession: “Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

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A Turning Point for Reformed Women in Ministry?

Jane Dempsey Douglass

One hundred sixty-four years ago, the first woman minister in a church of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) family was ordained. She was Antoinette Brown, in a Congregational Church in America. From that time on, there was first a very small but brave company of women continuously serving in ordained ministries. Then in the middle of the twentieth century, ordaining women became a normal practice in many of our member churches around the world, in many cultures. Even in those churches, however, women ministers often were not completely accepted, received lower salaries than men, and were restricted in their placement. Since then, world gatherings of Reformed Christians have encouraged the ordination of women, and the proportion of women in ministry has risen. In 1989 at the Seoul General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC, a predecessor of WCRC), a very intentional program to support women's ordination and women's equal treatment as ministers began. Now, around three-fourths of the member churches of WCRC ordain women.

A Declaration

The upcoming WCRC General Council meeting this summer in Leipzig will consider a proposal for WCRC to declare its belief that God calls women as well as men to participate fully in all the ministries of the church and to call on its member churches to pledge to support women fully in ministry as their common practice, to assure that women ministers will have equal standing with men.

This declaration could be a turning point for Reformed women in ministry. Member churches would be publicly pledging to evaluate their policies on the ordination of women and their treatment of women ministers with the intention of assuring equality between women and men. For some churches that do not yet ordain women, this declaration would be a challenge to re-examine their reasoning. When asked why they decline to ordain women, most of these churches have said the problem is cultural rather than theological. Some live in a cultural context where women do not properly take public positions of leadership, and women ministers could be an offense to the community. Some live in contexts dominated by Roman Catholic or Orthodox churches that refuse women's ordination, and the Reformed churches feel that women ministers could interfere with ecumenical relationships. Some, however, believe that the



Bible forbids women's ordination, and in faithfulness to the Bible, they cannot approve it. All these explanations have a significant history and deserve serious consideration. Change would be difficult.

Churches that do ordain women would be confronted by the reality that even today there remains across the globe a tendency in some circles to assume that women do not need as large a salary as men, and that they are not suitable for "important" placements or for church leadership. There is nervousness in some regions as the proportion of women in theological schools and in ordained leadership increases. Is the ministry becoming a female-dominated occupation so that men will feel less welcome in the churches? In other regions, there is concern that churches may not be making necessary efforts to open opportunities for women to obtain theological education. For example, the WCRC scholarships for women in the global South may not be fully utilized.

To speak of "all ministries" is to acknowledge that WCRC is itself an ecumenical community. All member churches have lay ministries in which women are very active, and some laypersons are employed in ministerial roles. Some member churches, in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, have a three-fold ministry of pastors, elders, and deacons, all of whom are ordained. At least one also has bishops. Some, in the congregational tradition, ordain only ministers or ministers and deacons. Some united churches have an episcopal government with ordained bishops, priests, and deacons. All these ministries would be fully open to women as well as men.

WCRC and its regional councils would be challenged to find ways to accompany all these churches helpfully as they re-examine their lives with respect to gender justice.

Why then should WCRC take a stronger stand now on behalf of women's ordination rather than continue in the same way to wait for more gradual change? There seem to be four fundamental reasons to move more urgently: 1) To follow Jesus' ministry as faithfully as we can. 2) To be the church as fully as we can. 3) To be a communion of churches as deeply as we can. 4) To witness to the world as boldly as we can.

Following Jesus' Ministry

To follow Jesus' ministry as faithfully as we can constantly requires fresh understanding of it. Our understanding of Jesus' ministry is shaped by the way we read the Bible. How do we read the Bible? The Bible for Reformed people is

the fundamental source and essential guide to theological thinking and daily living. Reformed people, however, do not engage in proof-texting—pulling out isolated verses to prove a point. They try to read the Bible passages in their own contexts, to read the whole Bible in its historical context, and to read the whole Bible in the light of the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ. They read it alone as part of their spiritual discipline. They also—importantly—read the Bible in community, sharing their insights with one another, listening to biblical scholars who can shed light on the text, hearing the Word proclaimed in public worship, and praying that the Holy Spirit will illuminate its meaning and guide their living.

No one can claim that women by virtue of their gender will necessarily be better pastors, better preachers, or better biblical scholars than men. Nonetheless, women by virtue of their different life experience often bring new insight into the biblical narrative that opens fresh meaning, just as the text may bring new meaning when we read it with people of different ethnic or social backgrounds.

For example, in an international Bible study group dealing with the story of the Syrophenician woman beseeching Jesus to heal her daughter (Mark 7: 25-30), most people were focused on the boldness of the mother and her effect on Jesus and his understanding of his mission. An Indian woman brought a different insight from a context that may well have much in common with that of Jesus: “The real miracle here is that the mother cared so much about a little girl-child!”

As more women have been educated to be pastors and biblical scholars, they have brought our attention to aspects of Jesus’ ministry and teaching that had been neglected. For example, you have often heard sermons on the good shepherd and the forgiving father of the prodigal son as parables about the nature of God. But how often have you heard a sermon on the woman searching for the lost coin as a parable about the nature of God? Yet those three stories clearly belong together (see Luke 15). Possibly the woman searching for the lost coin is neglected because preachers are uncomfortable with the female imagery for God. Yet unfolding this story in the same way as we unfold the story of the good shepherd and the forgiving father of the prodigal son as parables about God can be life-changing for women.

A story from real life will serve as illustration. A woman moderator of her presbytery was called on by virtue of her office to preach at a presbytery worship service. She chose as her text the story of the woman searching for the lost coin, drawing the parallel to the two related stories in Luke 15 and suggesting that her story, too, is a parable about God. A few weeks later



at a meeting, a male pastor from the presbytery drew her aside. He said emphatically, "You should never have preached on that text." The moderator inquired why he found it inappropriate. He replied, "You need to know how much trouble you have created. Let me tell you what happened. One of my fine women elders was present when you preached. She and her husband have been pillars of our church. They are both elders. She called me the next morning and said she had to see me that day. When she arrived, she said, "I cannot continue to live the way I have lived. I have been a battered woman all the years I have been married. I have often come to church with heavy makeup to cover the bruises from the beatings I have received from my husband. I have understood from the Bible that women are to be subject to their husbands, that Christians are supposed to forgive. So as a good Christian I have tried to bear the cross, and I have never told anyone about his violence. But last night thinking about that parable of the woman searching for the lost coin, something changed. I have always known that people are created in the image of God, but now that has a whole new meaning for me. When I really see myself as a woman created in the image of God, I realize that I cannot allow myself to be abused. I know my life will have to change." The pastor repeated as he walked away, "You should never have preached on that text."

The way we read the Bible can be a matter of life or death for women like this elder. So is the nature of pastoral care. Would that woman elder's life have been different if she had known a woman pastor in whom she could more easily confide? Would her pastor come to model his ministry more closely after that of Jesus' ministry of compassion if he were part of a circle of male and female pastors who were studying the Bible together and sharing their experience of pastoral care? Fortunately there are many male pastors who would have responded very differently to the woman elder's situation. The woman's pastor could learn that a ministry of compassion like that of Jesus is intended for men as well as for women.

Women pastors and biblical scholars in recent years have also profoundly reshaped our picture of Jesus' disciples. No longer focused just on twelve men, we are far more aware of how countercultural it was that women were so prominent among the disciples who followed Jesus, that he entrusted the message of his resurrection to the women, that Jesus enjoyed the friendship of Mary and Martha, that he was so open to public interaction with women like the Samaritan woman at the well and the Syrophenician woman, and that he did not rebuke the bleeding-and thus "unclean"-woman who touched his garment, but healed her.

We need the insights of women as well as men to help us comprehend the fullness of the life and ministry of Jesus so that we can follow more faithfully.

Being the Church

How can an affirmation of women's ordination help us to be the church more fully? Let us look at the role of women in the earliest church and Paul's vision of the nature of the church.

When the church was born at Pentecost, the women were there in the upper room with the men to receive the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts tells of many women, among them the four daughters of Philip who had the gift of prophesy, the women who opened their homes, Prisca who with her husband taught the preacher Apollos about the Way of God. Paul himself speaks warmly of his women coworkers at the end of the letter to the Romans: Phoebe, the minister (or deacon) of the church at Cenchreae, again Prisca and her husband, his coworkers "who risked their necks for my life," Mary, Junia the apostle, and Julia. So the women were not silent or passive bystanders. They worked hard, Paul says, and some went to prison with him. Notably Paul does not indicate that there is anything exceptional about having women coworkers. He simply lists a mixture of women and men.

We turn to Paul's vision of the church. In I Corinthians 12 and similarly in Romans 12, we have a vision of the one body with many members, each of which is indispensable to the health of the whole body. None can be despised. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." In a similar way the Holy Spirit has given different gifts to different members of the church, all of whom have been baptized into one body in the one spirit. The gifts such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, teaching, are allotted to each person as the Spirit chooses, but they are given for the common good.

It is clear that God through the Holy Spirit is free to offer gifts entirely on the basis of God's will. There is no suggestion that gender or age or social station plays any role in the distribution of gifts. The church's task seems to be to identify the Spirit's gifts in whomever they are found and use them for the common good. No one is to be spurned as useless in the church's life. Each member of the body is necessary for the functioning of the whole body, and there are many needed functions. Not all have gifts of leadership, but there are other tasks to be done.



Paul's vision suggests that the church must discern the gifts of women as well as men and welcome women to use their gifts in the service of the church's mission. After one hundred and sixty-four years, we have observed that the Holy Spirit has indeed bestowed on many women gifts of wisdom, faith, knowledge, and leadership that have equipped them well for ordained office and helped the church to flourish. There are many more whose gifts have been rejected, and the church has suffered for it.

The church has often created a climate where women are socialized to believe that their gifts are not needed. A male pastor explained that there are no women elders in his church because the women there do not believe it is appropriate for them to serve in ordained office. He mentioned that on a few occasions a nominating committee has proposed the names of women. But he has invited the women to come to him for counsel, and after his counseling they have decided that it is not appropriate for them to stand for election. A climate unwelcoming to women to use their gifts impoverishes the church.

In Galatians 3, the equality of women and men within the church community becomes explicit. Paul emphasizes here that within the body of Christ, all human barriers fall. Among the baptized, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Being the church as fully as we can, learning what it means to be the one body of Christ, will require us to receive the gifts given by the Spirit to women, in the same way as we do with men.

Being a Communion of Churches

Words matter. Why a "communion" of churches? In the late nineteenth-century origins of the world body of Presbyterian and Reformed churches and then the world body of Congregational churches, these bodies were called "alliances" or "councils." They were rather cautious attempts to bring together scattered churches that had often lost touch with each other through migration across the globe. Over time the member churches came to be far more closely knit. In mid-twentieth century the two world bodies merged as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Increasingly the churches came to regard themselves not simply as members of an ecclesiastical organization but as a "communion." This term suggests a far deeper sense of shared identity with a shared tradition and a shared family life. It evokes the living connection of those who come together

to share the Lord's Supper. In 2010 when WARC united with the Reformed Ecumenical Council, the new body became The World Communion of Reformed Churches. This change is not merely a change in nomenclature but a recognition that the new body is different from either of its predecessors. It seeks to be family in a new, more organic sense. It seeks deeper unity.

This unity does not mean uniformity. As we have seen, there are different patterns of church government among the member churches. They share a history of connection to the Calvinist reformation in sixteenth-century Geneva, though the Czech Brethren and Waldensians also represent reforming traditions already well established before that time. Quite a few are united churches bringing together various denominational backgrounds, but with a strong Reformed heritage in their history that they continue to honor. Official confessions of faith vary because Reformed churches believe that each regional church should confess its faith in its own context, yet they believe their varied confessions express the same faith. Confessions created in one place are often shared with churches in other places as a sign of solidarity. For example, the Belhar Confession of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, proclaiming its bold witness to the Gospel in the apartheid struggle, has been adopted by a number of churches in Europe, North America, and Central America.

Reformed churches share also a powerful commitment to human rights and the work of justice. Twice the member churches of WARC have come together to declare a statement of faith about injustice: at the General Council in Ottawa in 1982 concerning apartheid, and at the General Council in Accra in 2004 concerning global economic injustice and injustice to the Earth.

The Strategic Plan of the young WCRC declares: "...We pledge ourselves and our churches to be bonded together in communion and God's justice in the world, as we covenant together for justice in the economy and the earth. As a family of Reformed Christians we are committed to demonstrate through our life together the unity that God intends for all humankind. We are committed to live out this reality not for ourselves alone, but rather for the whole created order as a united fellowship that exists to be a living witness to God's intention of justice, in all of its dimensions, for our world." (Introduction) "As a communion the WCRC is based on the understanding of koinonia. Jesus Christ has revealed that koinonia is the reality of the participation of his sisters and brothers into his body. This reality is clearly visible in our life when we share bread and wine at Christ's table when in fact we share the body and blood of Christ and when



through this koinonia 'all kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged.'¹ Therefore the WCRC affirms that there can be no communion without justice and no justice without communion." (6.1.2. See also 6.1.3)

In this context, injustice on the basis of gender is one of the kinds of injustice that must be radically challenged. A deep experience of unity among the Reformed churches requires attention to situations where women are excluded from ordained positions of church leadership simply because they are women or where ordained women are treated differently than men. To challenge this injustice is not an attempt to break unity but to deepen unity. Within the bonds of a family such challenges are possible, and they are a sign of love. Within the bonds of a family, the members will accompany one other as they face challenges together.

WCRC would be challenged to find the way to accompany member churches who find within themselves institutional injustice to women, of whatever sort. Are the regional bodies of WCRC equipped to provide this accompaniment? Responding to this challenge would help to make our communion as deep as we can.

Witnessing to the World

The church never lives for itself alone. The vision we have sketched from Paul is of the inner life of the church where Christians are bound together with each other in Christ by baptism and gather at the Lord's Table. This very body of Christ exists to announce the good news of the Gospel to the world, a task to which Paul and his coworkers devoted their lives.

How can an affirmation of women's ordination make our witnessing to the world more bold?

We have mentioned the problem of churches living in a culture that could be offended by a decision to ordain women for public leadership. No one should minimize the seriousness of this problem, especially those who do not themselves live in such a situation. Unless strong relationships have been established with leaders of other religious communities and with civic leaders, it would be a challenge to interpret the reason for ordaining women and a challenge for the first woman minister to find her way. Nonetheless, it is true that the church has often lived in cultures where the Gospel is considered offensive and by the authenticity of its life has made a powerful witness to

¹ World Council of Churches, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (1982 Lima ext).

its faith. The first women ministers in any setting have faced obstacles to their acceptance. To some degree the church has always been called to be countercultural even as it seeks to be the church of that place, rooted in the life of the local community and culture. In a setting where it is assumed that women are not worthy or capable of the role of spiritual leader, a conscientious theological decision to ordain women would be a bold and courageous witness to the Gospel.

All across the globe women suffer discriminatory treatment because of their gender. In the daily news we hear stories about sexual harassment of women by public figures, mass rape as a tool of war, inequality of pay for the same work, fatal quarrels over dowry and forced child marriage, trafficking of women and girls, violent attempts to keep girls away from school, women's inability to own or inherit property, their exclusion from community decision-making, the difficulty they have in obtaining health care. In this light, gender discrimination is not simply a matter of disrespect, wrongful as that is, but a genuine threat to the life and health of women and girls, to their ability to survive and to thrive, to their ability to develop the gifts they could bring to their communities. In fact, women are key players in community development. Studies have shown that educating girls and women is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty.

As a matter of justice there is urgency for all who care about the human family to become advocates for full equality of women and men. Many churches and church people have engaged themselves in this struggle. They collaborate with secular and humanitarian groups, and this collaboration is itself an important witness. The stories of Jesus' ministry shape our commitment to minister to all who are vulnerable in society. Christians understand the need to bring dignity to all the human family, because all people are made equally in the image of God, and churches are prepared to resist many forms of exploitation of women. Nonetheless, so long as our institutional life as churches discriminates against women, by refusing to allow them to serve in ordained leadership or by offering ordained women restricted roles or lower salaries than their male counterparts, our moral authority is compromised. We show our acceptance that women do not deserve the same respect as men and that women by their very nature are less competent to give spiritual leadership.

A WCRC affirmation of women's ordination could demonstrate the consistency of our commitment to justice for women and make our witness to the world more bold. It could be a turning point for Reformed women's ministry.



Jane Dempsey Douglass was president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) from 1990-1997. She worked closely with its program to nurture partnership between women and men in church and society and to carry out the mandate of the Seoul General Council (1989) to encourage the ordination of women and equal treatment of ordained women and men by the churches. An honorary member of the WARC Executive Committee until the Accra General Council in 2004, she helped organize and taught in the first WARC Global Institute of Theology in Accra. Educated at Harvard University, she was professor of the history of Christianity and historical theology at Claremont School of Theology, Claremont Graduate University, and later at Princeton Theological Seminary, and the first woman president of the American Society of Church History. Her research focused on the Reformation and the history of women in the church. Now retired in Claremont, California, she chairs the Napier Initiative, an intergenerational program of mentoring and academic courses, bringing together university students and faculty with a passion for social justice and elders experienced in working for social justice, to enrich the lives of all.

Listen, Listen, God is Calling! Reflections on Women's Ordination

HyeRan Kim-Cragg

The 2017 General Council theme, "Living God, renew and transform us," points to the Divine Spirit at work among us. While this General Council marks a historic event, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the theme is not only about a commemoration of the past but about a celebration of the present that is oriented toward the future. God is not static, and we are called to discern a call that is dynamic, challenging us to be faithful and prophetic today and in the days to come. The theme also captures our imagination with a vision of the Kingdom of God that is here and now. We imagine a transformed world, a radically different world, even though we recognize the broken and unjust reality in which we live. Women's ordination is one such reality, a reality yearning for fulfillment.

What is at stake?

The issue of women's ordination has been viewed as a church-dividing issue. But is it? Should the issue of women's ordination become the issue that polarizes the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)? Can we be in communion when certain members of the communion are being kept from using their Spirit-gifts to build up the Body of Christ and to share fully in God's mission in the world? Does Scripture restrict the scope and nature of women's ordination on the basis of gender? What does God, the Living God, require of us in this matter?

1. The issue of women's ordination is more than a church doctrine issue.

The ordination of women issue derives from a biblical witness, manifested in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. How Jesus treated women, men, and children matters. Equally important is the context. Christian faith does not exist in a vacuum. Our church is in the world. It is not an option for the church to not engage with the world, its brokenness and its wholeness. Our faith is influenced by our own contexts, which are culturally and socially bound. Connecting the biblical witness with the contexts means that as social conditions change, the weight and meaning of particular passages may change as well. It is critical to know this as a limitation but at the same time a reference point. The following story from the United Church of Canada may be a good example of how women's ordination issue should be looked at biblically and contextually.



Lydia Gruchy was the first ordained woman in the United Church of Canada in 1936. She was also the first woman student studying theology at the Presbyterian Theological College (now St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon) in 1920. Upon her graduation in 1923 she was sent to work with children in Verigin, Saskatchewan. Soon she was leading worship services there, and in 1926 Kamsack Presbytery requested her ordination. When a motion was made at the 1926 General Council (the first Council after the church union as the United Church of Canada) to grant this request, the "meeting exploded."

The Christian social context of the 1920s through the 1950s strongly opposed the idea of women working in the public sphere. Contextually speaking, the idea of ordaining women was difficult to accept in Canada at that time, probably other places as well. It was virtually impossible to imagine women as equals to men in public positions. In this context it is possible to understand why the General Council of 1926 "exploded" with this issue, and it took 10 years for Gruchy to be ordained. Even in the decades following her ordination it was a long and difficult road for women (especially married women) to be ordained. However, there is another factor that needs to be named here: the context of post-World War I and II. Not only did Canadians lose so many young men, but they also witnessed the old family order fall apart. As a matter of fact, Lydia's brother, who was a very promising theology student, was killed during World War I. Wartime saw many women taking jobs that used to belong to men in public places. These losses and the great societal changes that occurred through this period made the call for the ordination of women something that could be imagined.

Let us go back to 1926. The 1926 General Council constituted a Committee on the Ordination of Women with instructions to report to the General Council. This report came in 1928 and offered biblical references of some New Testament passages concerning women and public leadership in the church. It asserted that according to the gospels, Jesus considered men and women to be spiritually equal. It then quoted the writings of Paul. The report cited I Corinthians 2:5 and Galatians 3:26-28 to show how women and men exercised leadership as equals in the early church. It also noted passages attributed to Paul that restricted the ministries women might exercise in the church, such as I Corinthians 14:34-36. By reading these different passages together, the report undermined the binding authority that these latter passages would have if cited alone. Here is an instance of different passages from Scripture being used to help determine the relative weight or meaning of a passage in question.

Biblically speaking, two insights can be gleaned from this report. One is the

ambiguity of Scripture, which sometimes contains contradicting views. Paul spoke of women as equals to his fellow workers and leaders in one place. But in another place and to a different audience he downplayed women's roles in the church. While the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it is not to be taken literally because of its ambiguity and ambivalence. The second insight is that we as interpreters of the Bible have evangelical freedom to counterbalance the weight of passages that have come to be seen as going against the underlying tenor of biblical revelation on such particular issues as women's ordination. Evangelical freedom is the freedom Christians have to go beyond established practices or understandings of the faith in response to the Gospel. The general orientation of teachings by Jesus and that of Paul in Galatians 3 were invoked to relativize the explicit teachings of some biblical passages (e.g., Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Timothy 2:9-15) as no longer binding in detail.

The United Church of Canada's story shows how we can learn from our foremothers and forefathers of faith who took a biblically sound position that led to a prophetic, countercultural call to justice, a call to the inclusion of women in ordained ministry. The North American culture of the 1920s through 1950s opposed the public role of women, such as in leadership in churches. Yet, this particular church heeded a biblical call against the pervasive reading of its own cultural context by discerning God's voice in the Bible. The life and the ministry of Jesus as the Word of God incarnate was the guiding principle of how they as a community of faith felt they must address the issue of women's ordination.

2. The issue of women's ordination is more than an issue of tradition.

It is no longer sufficient to approve or oppose women's ordination simply on the grounds that the church has or has not done so in the past. Rather, Christians must engage in theological anthropology, a study of what it means to be human in relation to God. The 2017 General Council confesses belief in God as a living God, and not a God in the past only. Its theme directly points at "us," with whom God made a covenant and to whom God called. It is "us" who are to be renewed and transformed both as individual human beings and as a community. To point to "us" is also to recognize that our human relationship is broken. The Divine Spirit grieved because of our rebellion (Isaiah 63:10) and Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) because we disobeyed God by allowing ourselves to treat women to be unequal to men. Where does this inequality come from? Is there any theological justification that women are subordinate to men?



To respond to this, we must go back to the beginning of how humans were created in the Bible. The creation story in Genesis has two different, seemingly opposite, versions. Genesis 1 clearly tells that God created both female and male in the image of God, pointing to the equality of men and women. Chapter 2 has a different account. God created a man first, and then a woman was created out of this man's ribs. The latter account has served to justify the inferiority of women, placing women in a secondary place relative to men.

While these two accounts seem contradictory this is not the case when one examines the biblical meanings of the following two words—that is, *ezer* (helper) and *adam* (humanity). The word *ezer* comes when God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a *helper* as his partner” (Genesis 2:18). Biblical scholars have sought out other uses of *ezer* through the Bible. The word appears 29 times in the Hebrew Scriptures and it mostly appears when referring to God. In the case of God being our helper (i.e., Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7; Psalm 20:2, 33:20), this word *ezer* is used. Thus the first woman as the helper does not imply her subordination to men or a secondary status as far as the biblical witness is concerned. Furthermore, right after the helper is mentioned God called the woman a “partner,” that is an equal companion to the man.

The other important word is *adam*, which is often taken for the name of the first man in the Bible. However, in Genesis 1:26-27, *adam* refers to the human person or humanity of both female and male. It may be argued that a singular noun that represents both female and male genders emphasizes human unity in diversity. Male and female are created together for partnership with one another and with God as part of God's desire to bless the whole world.

In short, a theological anthropology out of both the Genesis 1 and 2 affirms relationality. As human beings we are related to one another and to God. We cannot live alone. God saw this at the very beginning. Not only do we need God but also we need each other. As much as we try to deceive ourselves that we are independent, capable of doing things alone, we know from the bottom of our heart that we must depend on each other. As much as the world, our economic and social system, endorses hierarchy and inequality as the status quo, we as people of faith know that that is not God's way. We know from the bottom of our heart that we cannot live fully until the unequal relationships are broken down and mended.

3. To affirm women's ordination is to declare the priesthood of all believers not only with words but also with actions.

Not ordaining women in public ministry may be status quo, and for some, it may look even natural, following the long-standing tradition in church history. But it is not what God requires of us. We must listen, listen to God calling us to repent and to renew so that we would be transformed, taking a prophetic step, beholding a world that is constituted with equality and justice. From the very beginning, when God created "us," both female and male in the image of God, God said, "it was very good."

There are many stories of women in the leadership roles throughout the history of the church so it is ironic that women's ordination is still strongly opposed in many churches. One may imagine an undercurrent of living water moving beneath the frozen ice above. Though the reality looks fixed and static, this frozen water is bound to melt and move with the current below eventually. There are plenty of exemplary Christian women whose public leadership in church and society bears witness to the spiritual gifts with which God endowed them. Churches in our communion have confirmed that the Holy Spirit is indeed calling women to ordained ministries and through them equipping the members of the church to be light and salt of the earth.

In the early church, before it succumbed to the lure of power, there were many amazing women leaders. Here are a few examples. St. Perpetua was educated and was a teacher for the church. She is the author of the earliest extant extra-biblical teaching material. When she was 21 years old, like many other martyrs of her day, she was held in prison in the Coliseum and eventually murdered in 203.¹

By the medieval era, the only official role available to women in the church was that of a nun. Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) devoted her life entirely to know the mind of Christ. She recorded 16 experiential visions from God, which were about the creation and fall, the crucifixion of Christ and grace. Her writings are the first of any English woman.¹ The church historian Jane Douglas claims that Christine de Pisan, a lay woman who lived around the turn of the fifteenth century, set off a centuries-long literary debate about the nature of women in which she challenged the theologians' assumptions.

The Reformation took place. Marie Dentiere in the early years of the Reformation

¹ Shannon Nicole Smythe, *Women in Ministry: Questions and Answers in the Exploration of a Calling* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015).



in Geneva took up this debate, insisting that the liberating Gospel called on women to speak and write, and she did, according to Douglas. Katherine Zell (1497-1562) met and married Mathew Zell, a Catholic priest, and together carried on ministry in partnership with one another. The Catholic Church excommunicated him for his marriage, but the Lutheran church took him in. When their marriage began to hurt their ministry, Katherine wrote and published a well-argued biblical defense for their marriage. Later it was commended by Martin Luther.¹

In North America Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874), though married to Walter Palmer, pledged her life to the promotion of holiness. In 1835, Phoebe and her sister established a women's prayer meeting, and in two years this became the start of a renewal that would eventually impact all of American Methodism. She was well known for her exhortations and preaching. Her influence was advanced by her writings. She critiqued the church by remarking that it had buried women's gifts in a Potter's Field. This field is referenced in Matthew 27:1-10, pointing to a land to bury foreigners purchased with the money Judas received for the betrayal of Jesus.¹

Many missionaries went out all over the world in the 19th century. While their attitude was often colonial and oppressive, some of their evangelization work was illuminating and liberating in terms of women's education. Jeong-Shin Yang was one beneficiary from this education. Born in northern Korea, she became blind at age six due to illness. She was invited to go to a school for the blind that missionaries from North America had built. Despite her physical disability, she was enabled through this school to go on to study medicine in Japan and theology in the USA in the 1940s and 1950s. She became the first ordained woman in the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea in 1977.

It is nothing surprising to note that the church lost its vitality when it lost sight of the equality of women and men. Once the church was established and institutionalized, it exercised its power like an imperial state. As the church became the dominant power in society, the role of women was pushed to the margin. Attempts were made to silence women to the point that they were murdered such as in the witch hunts of the inquisition. But as we have listed above, there were strong and faithful women who the church failed to silence. These women form a cloud of faithful witnesses, watching over "us," who were called by God. This same God, this Living God, is calling us to open a new chapter of the WCRC history.

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Challenges for the Life and Mission of the Churches: Our lived experience of gender-based violence

Claudia Tron

- 290 women in Argentina died as victims of femicide in 2016.
- 42 people died in related homicides, and 401 children lost their mothers.
- There are no accurate statistics regarding all the crimes of violence and rapes committed against women.
- During 2017 it is projected that one woman will be a victim of femicide every 18 hours¹.

I would like to speak about the reality of violence which our patriarchal culture generates and sustains, a problem which permeates the life of our churches, where it is known but never spoken about. To do this I must begin by citing some of the fundamental principles which were agreed upon in Argentina as the framework for convening the International Women's Strike on March 8th 2017.

These principles present a clear analysis of the ways in which gender-based violence prevents women, children and adolescents from attaining the abundant life of which Jesus speaks, the abundant life we so often hear about in sermons preached in our churches (John 10:10).

These principles are the product of the collective work of social movements, networks and alliances to which many of our churches and ecumenical organizations belong. They represent conclusions drawn from the analysis of present day realities. They are not carried out by those who view this reality from a distance only as an object of study, but rather by collectives and communities energized by the gender perspective, by Latin American feminism and thus by the questions which these analytical tools enable us to ask.

We draw strength from our common experience of our bodies, our voices, our identities, memories and wisdom, from our diverse life experience. We meet one another on our common path in the quest for gender justice. That justice which achieves a truly comprehensive scope because it works to unmask patriarchy, to bring to light its effects and its causes: violence against women, hunger, exploitation of workers, mistreatment of nature, discrimination, exclusion of everyone and everything that is different from what is established by the parameters of the dominant order.

¹ <https://www.lacasadencuentro.org/femicidios.html>.

“We declare that the capitalist system exploits the informal economies on which women depend, those that are flexible, temporary in nature and thus precarious. We declare that the governments and the market exploit us by keeping us in debt. That governments criminalize our economic migratory movement. That we are consistently paid less than men and that the salary gap here stands at 27%. That work in the home and caring for family members is not recognized as valid work or properly compensated, and that this work adds a minimum of three hours to the working day of a woman. That these situations of economic violence increase our vulnerability to male violence, the most extreme form of which is femicide.

We must expose the continuing reality that because caregiving is not a responsibility of the whole society we find ourselves obliged to continue to replicate the classist and colonial model of exploitation among women: in order to be able to work outside the home we are dependent on the labour of other women. To be able to leave our families to seek work in other places we are dependent on other women.

It is essential for us to give real value to these invisible kinds of work that women do, to build up networks of support and create vigorous strategies in these difficult circumstances, in this crisis of violence against women. We are on strike because the victims of femicide are absent from our midst. In Argentina alone their voices are being violently silenced, at the spine-chilling rate of one woman per day. We are on strike because the lesbians and trans people murdered in hate crimes are absent from our midst. Because the women political prisoners, the women persecuted for their beliefs, the women murdered across Latin America for defending their land and resources, all these are absent from our midst.

The women imprisoned because their ways of getting money to survive have been criminalized are not present with us, while the crimes committed by the corporations and the narco-traffickers go unpunished because they benefit the capitalist system. The women who have died or been imprisoned because of unsafe abortions are not here with us. The women who have been disappeared are not here with us.

And confronted by the reality of homes which have been turned into hell on earth by domestic violence, we are organizing among ourselves to defend and care for each other. Not one more woman. We want to survive”.²

² Call for International Women’s Strike, Buenos Aires, January 2017. “Not one more woman. We want to survive”).



Yet even as we celebrate our coming together, and the alliances forged by so many diverse organizations, all committed to overcoming all the forms and manifestations of gender-based violence, still the various forms of fundamentalism continue to grow, protected by the dominant system. They strive to minimize the actual level of violence, and to justify the oppression biblically and theologically. They call into question the use of the gender perspective, using pejorative language to label it as an “ideology” which threatens the social order, the integrity of the family and public morality.

It is in this context, that our churches, inheritors of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and united in our vocation to engage in ecumenical dialogue, are trying not to lose our prophetic identity faced with this reality of gender-based violence. We are denouncing all forms of oppression, why we are announcing, revealing, and sharing that Light which shines out in the darkness, that Light which the darkness cannot extinguish.

The Churches and the Patriarchal Structures: Seeking Real Change to Eradicate These Structures

The logic of patriarchy runs through the entire history of the Christian church. It has been perpetuated by means of its references, practices, organizations, and oral and written records. (Indeed) our western culture has been founded and built up using this logic. We have learned and been taught to understand ourselves, think about ourselves and relate to each other using this patriarchal logic. And it has been kept in place in androcentric thinking, which Christianity and its most influential exponents have forcibly maintained in our culture.

We can see this in the works of male theologians like Saint Thomas and Saint Augustine, both of whom stated with regard to this subject that the original element is the male. That the feminine gender is merely auxillary and instrumental, its purpose being procreation. Using the concepts which the science of biology of his time made available to him, Thomas Aquinas agreed with the position of Aristotle in his belief that the semen of the male provided the entire genetic make-up of the embryo, and that the mother only provided the blood or material from which the body would be grown. According to these normative beliefs, each male seed was meant to produce another male, and females were only produced when inferior material gained dominance over the superior genetic material, thus producing a woman, which was therefore in effect a defective man.³

³ Radford Ruether, Rosmary. *Mujer Nueva, Tierra Nueva*. Editorial La aurora. Buenos Aires, 1977.

If we bear in mind only this one example, we can well imagine how these ideas have facilitated and reinforced patriarchy and androcentrism over time, how they have become the parameters used in the differential valuing of masculine and feminine, without any questioning of those parameters.

This way of conceptualizing the world in dualistic/binary terms permeates western culture in so many forms: good-bad, reason-passion, saint-whore, duty-pleasure, God-devil, heaven-hell, man-woman. All these have made the matrix of gender control even stronger. And they have reinforced the pre-eminence of the idea of opposition and confrontation, in which there is no room for diversities.

Feminism using the gender perspective first introduced into social and cultural thought the concept that the identities and behaviors of women and men are not determined by biological characteristics, but rather by deeply rooted cultural constructs. These cultural constructs, the ways in which we understand "masculine" and "feminine", have remained unchanged for a very long time. It is feminism and the gender perspective which have overturned these "certainties" about biology. They have called into question the way in which we learn and construct gender identities, these long-held ideas which permeate our social, political, sexual, educational and religious contexts: As men and women we are not the reflection of (some) natural reality, but rather the result of a historical and cultural (production)

Over the centuries this historical and cultural construct has assigned separate roles, attributes and spheres of activity to men and women, and this assigning of fixed roles has been legitimized by all of our institutions. In our patriarchal societies, the roles valued most highly by culture have been those assigned to men who work in the public sphere, while women have been assigned less prestigious and less visible roles in the private sphere of the home. When we look at these roles and assigned attributes from a gender perspective we can see how the patriarchal and androcentric logical system is at once the basis of and the justification for inequality, inequity, injustice and therefore the symbolic power of violence - this violence which results from the fact that people have in their minds certain principles of perception.

This logic, this way of conceptualizing gender roles, has over many generations become internalized, understood as something natural to human beings, and does not allow for a critical analysis to enter into the picture. Thus most people in our society, and in our churches, have not questioned, would not think of



questioning, our own history. From a psychological perspective we have been programmed to internalize and reproduce oppressive paradigms, even though we are not able to identify them as such, because the oppression has been so much a part of our lives and accepted as natural.

Through its ecclesiastical structures and hierarchies, Christianity has been both the product and the replicator of cultural patriarchy in western countries. The depictions of Christian life and values have reinforced strength, violence, productivity, intelligence, liberty, bravery, and virility as properties of men, and sensitivity, religiosity, solidarity, tenderness, conformity, shyness and chastity as being the properties of women.

As communities of faith we are called to:

Carry out an in-depth exercise in self-criticism, taking on responsibility for the task of deconstructing the oppressive paradigms which in the past justified and continue in the present day to justify gender violence and patriarchy, and in particular to do this in situations where elements of religion are used to justify this oppression.

Promote and accompany the new understandings which are generating a liberating praxis which comes from a critical reading of reality. These ideas find their expression in new forms of celebration, diakonia, and development of pastoral work, and also in the production of new biblical and theological foundational works which in turn provide support for these new practices.

The gender perspective represents a paradigm shift: an opportunity to redefine the life and mission of our churches. An opportunity which gives rise to new hope.

To unmask the patriarchy which is so firmly installed in our religious institutions, organizations, practices and logical constructs, so that our pastoral accompaniment of the struggle to overcome gender-based violence can be truly liberating, and not a mere reproduction of that which we wish to root out.

Our Bodies Matter: Towards a more sensitive pastoral approach to gender violence

We would like to share a contribution to this struggle which comes out of experience acquired over a number of years walking alongside groups of women doing pastoral work, diakonia, and training, working to create new spaces in

which women can experience more abundant life. This is a new way of reading Luke 13:10-17 which has been enlightening for us:

“¹⁰One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. ¹¹A woman there had an evil spirit that had kept her sick for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called out to her, ‘Woman, you are free from your sickness!’ ¹³He placed his hands on her, and at once she straightened herself up and praised God.

“¹⁴The official of the synagogue was angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, so he spoke up and said to the people, ‘There are six days in which we should work; so come during those days and be healed, but not on the Sabbath!’

“¹⁵The Lord answered him, ‘You hypocrites! Any one of you would untie your ox or your donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath. ¹⁶Now here is this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept in bonds for eighteen years; should she not be released on the Sabbath?’ ¹⁷His answer made his enemies ashamed of themselves, while the people rejoiced over all the wonderful things that he did.”

- The bent over body of a woman, as the symbolic expression of all the forms of oppression which double over the bodies and alienate the spirits of women in every corner of the earth, Her bent-over body speaks.
- A woman with suspicion, condemnation and moral judgments hanging over her: she has spent 18 years inhibited by a “spirit” which will not let her straighten up.
- Her presence on that Sabbath in the synagogue, which is a primarily masculine space, and she being considered impure because of her infirmity, these things make the episode even more poignant.
- This woman whose name we do not know, who asks for nothing. Who knows that her word is not valued because of the low value assigned to women in her culture. This woman who knows, who senses, that what she says would be negated. seeks to express herself in a different language, that of her body, her condemned, suffering, broken body. This woman who by her mere presence speaks, cries out, asks for justice, denounces injustice, seeks the new way, the way that liberates.



- So great is the clamor of this woman's body that Jesus is able to interpret its message: He sees her, he calls out to her, he speaks to her, he places his hands on her and says that through the action of God she will regain her health, her balance, her erect posture.
- Everyone in the synagogue except for Jesus was ignoring the woman. The chief priest of the synagogue reproached him for healing on the Sabbath. According to the Jewish authorities, such ailments were the result of failure to observe of the law. Fatalism, guilt and hopelessness were the sentence which the patriarchal mentality of the temple imposed on this woman.

When the woman senses that Jesus has reached out to her, knows that God has cured her infirmity, she leaves behind her passive role. She begins to move around freely, to offer praise, to be a protagonist.

- In the worship in the synagogue, in accordance with the established custom, there was no way in which a woman, oppressed, violated by the ideas, customs and dominant power of her time, could speak, could make pronouncements, participate, heal herself.
- Jesus indeed saw a person whom no one else saw, heard and interpreted the language of her body, broke through the stereotypes and the false logic of established power, making possible for her the path toward a life of dignity and fullness.
- And so the miracle happened. One Sabbath day, Jesus freed a woman from the weight of so many years of submission to the established laws and traditions. And the woman began a new a time in her life, of self-affirmation and re-appropriation of her body which had been kept subdued by patriarchal commands. A time to give praise for what had happened.⁴

This text from Luke and this new way of reading it accompanies us in our quest for new pastoral practices committed to the destruction of patriarchy and to overcoming gender-based violence. It suggests to us a number of methodological tracks and tools we should keep in mind:

⁴ Foulkes, Irene. Primeros pasos en la lectura bíblica desde la perspectiva de género. Relaciones de Género en la iglesia. Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana. San José. 2006.

1. Learn to truly look, listen, read and interpret silences, gestures and body language. Violence against women is part of our daily reality, but very often denied, silenced, kept invisible by victims and perpetrators. But the cry for equality and justice is voiced and sensed in other ways, through other sorts of language. The violence and its victims are present in our communities of faith, in our streets, in our organizations, seeking to be seen, to be heard, to be healed, and to be able to achieve dignity and joy. Only Jesus saw the suffering woman.

2. In our culture, every one of us and everything we are is rooted in a patriarchal and androcentric ideology which permeates and conditions the construction of our gender identities, our ways of relating to one another, how we structure our families, our organizations, our educational environments, our faith communities. The logic of patriarchy both produces and perpetuates the use of domination, authoritarianism, verticality, denial, abuse, inequity, and discrimination. The recognition of the fact of this violence and the struggle to overcome all forms of violence is not possible without the capacity to expose this logic of patriarchy, to challenge its validity, to develop strategies to deconstruct it and to create alternatives to it.

Gender analysis is the tool which helps us to do this work, to open up new paths, new models for relationships, and new models of family life, education and ways of being church. It is the tool which allows us to understand how the dominant logic functions and how it replicates itself, to see clearly the cultural imagination which it generates with its oppressive and violent power. And at the same time gender analysis proposes to us a reuniting, the re-appropriation of our bodies and our sexuality, the restructuring of established roles, new ways of sharing power. These new approaches will produce a revolution in our subjectivities and in the ways in which we organize ourselves in our institutions, including in the church and in our pastoral practice.

The gender perspective creates an opportunity for conversion of the church, a new construct based on dialogue, self-confidence, cooperation and solidarity. Jesus had to break the rules to help the bent-over woman. He had to deconstruct paradigms, go against the dominant logic, so that the healing of the woman could happen. He had to heal on the Sabbath. The church, through its biblical interpretation and theological discourse engenders in us mindsets that are subjectified by faith. Biblical-theological thought framed in the patriarchal ideology cannot lead to pastoral actions which can liberate our society from gender-based violence. When there is an absence of critical vision in regard to patriarchy very different sorts of resistance develop, such as a superficial



type of support which does not permit the theme of violence to be addressed in a serious manner, but which rather relies on lamentable phrases such as “she must have brought it on herself” and “love bears all things”. These sorts of responses make the church a generator and replicator of violence. And they also reveal the resistance that awakens fear of a new form of administration and use of power: Resistance to gender equity. The chief priest of the synagogue was greatly disturbed by the healing of the woman on the Sabbath.

Re-read the Bible from the gender perspective. Uncritical and fundamentalist readings and interpretations of the Bible do not contribute to our ability to value ourselves as women. They keep us locked inside a framework of silence and oblivion, forgotten. They keep us demonized, they do not let us speak. They do not let us ask, who were they? Where were they? What did they feel, these women who are mentioned in passing or not even mentioned in the biblical texts? What did the men feel, they who were also subject to the established mandates and models of behavior?

The gender perspective is a tool which helps us to expose the gender-based violence in the biblical texts, the class-based violence, the violence of discrimination based on ethnicity, and all the forms of inequality which took away and today still take away our fullness of life.

3. There are community efforts which are prevented from joining us on this journey, groups that are also victims of patriarchal violence. An approach to pastoral work which is committed to overcoming gender-based violence will only be genuine if it is allowed to change and grow, cross lines, challenge and transform, using the gender perspective.

Conclusion

In our quest for liberation from violence we seek to dismantle an identity assigned to women that is based on the views of others than ourselves, based on patterns that have been imposed on us. We are committed to following new paths that make it possible for us to be subjects, to be autonomous.

We must recognize the overvaluing of men and devaluing of women which the construct of patriarchal gender identities has established and perpetuates. We must do analysis and develop strategies to use in the deconstruction of these myths.

We must make visible in our society the ways in which this differential valuing of men and women permeates all the institutions of which we are part. We must empower ourselves, we must design new strategies, work collectively to create new forms of organization. As women, we must not repeat the same models of the location of power which have been used before.

We must facilitate self- knowledge, re discover identities, origins, wisdom, memories, stories of cosmovisions, experiences and expressions of God and of faith. We must do the work necessary to make the hidden visible, to give new value to people, to put the unspoken into words, to tell stories: to strengthen self-esteem.

We must:

Develop new concepts of masculinity.

Discover and give value to the everyday places and spaces that engender new understanding, new faith, and new theological reflection.

Make space for the personal in-group situations, and for group understandings in the personal. Find ways to listen, dialogue and empathize in our common spaces.

Recover the language of our bodies, expressed in gesture, affect, artistic and playful ways.

Rediscover ourselves, the wholeness and integrity that we possess, in order to overcome the fragmentation to which we are so vulnerable because of patriarchy and violence.

Recover and give renewed meaning to the dignity of our bodies, to our sexuality, as physical pleasure has so often been negated by guilt and displeasure. Learn to hear and interpret what the corporeal language (the language of our bodies) is communicating.

Equip ourselves to be able to intervene and accompany one another in the face of the many forms and expressions of violence, having trained ourselves to be able to identify its symptoms.

Join with social movements and put together interdisciplinary networks. As churches, recognize and increase the capacity we have for public and political advocacy.



Be a community that truly lives its faith, nourishes and celebrates that faith, drawing on all its diversity of contributions and languages, calling forth the protagonism of each and every one of us.

This concerted action will set in motion an alternative process of community building, a new process different from that which is set in stone in the imagination of the established ecclesiastical order: a change of paradigms, a truly liberating process, one that will enable us to function as communities which have rediscovered our prophetic vocation, to have new courage to speak out, to declare the Good News, to build new relationships which are both diverse and inclusive.

*Tower clock, toll the hours for me
So that all the women will awaken,
For if all the women waken
They will regain their great powers!
- Author unknown*

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Some Insights on Imago Dei in the Light of our Present Context

Philip Vinod Peacock

Introduction

Mohammad Rafiq Shah has just been released from an Indian Prison after having spent twelve years in Jail. Wrongfully imprisoned for bomb blasts that took place in New Delhi in February 2005, Shah was, just a few days from writing, absolved and acquitted of all charges. Of course what has happened to Shah is only a tip of the iceberg. It hides the series of arrests of young Muslim men in this country and perhaps all over the world on flimsy or no charges at all leaving them to languish in jail. It hides the torture and human rights abuses that make up part of our legal system. It hides the retreat of the state from all public services except “security,” which has become nothing but a code word for promoting the interests of the rich and the powerful. And neither is this a specifically Indian problem either. This situation seems to be found in the United States of America with the whole Black Lives Matter movement and the protests over the Dakota pipeline. It echoes in the Philippines with the struggles of the indigenous people, it echoes over Europe with recent decisions being made to make the handing over of food to migrants illegal, and most of all it seems to have come to a head in West Asia with atrocities being perpetrated by state actors in real and proxy wars with non-state actors such as the ISIS who are killing anyone, Muslims and Christians alike, who is in disagreement with their vision of how they want to shape the world.

The question that echoes through all of this is what worth does human life have? Particularly at such a time as this it becomes incumbent on us as theologians and as a church to clarify our thinking on the human person. That is to say, what is theological anthropology? From very ancient times, theological thinking within the Judeo-Christian heritage has considered the Imago Dei or the image of God to be the cornerstone of Judeo-Christian thinking on who humans are and what is their relationship to God¹, other humans, and the world around them. The effort of this essay will be to relook at some of the theological insights that have been made about the image of God and to see what relevance this can offer us for our understanding of the human person in the light of our present crisis.

The concept of the Imago Dei is among those conceptualizations that seem to have

¹ Cf. Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985) p. 215.



found a greater place in philosophical theology than Biblical Theology. Fact is that the term “image of God” is mentioned only five times in the Bible, and three of these occasions are part of the priestly writings in Genesis (Genesis 1^{26 & 27}, 5^{1 & 3}, and 9⁶). However, it should also be mentioned that the idea of the Imago Dei is the background for the understanding of Psalm 8⁵, Wisdom 2²³, and Ecclesiasticus 17³, and that it is also used as a traditional concept for the understanding of certain New Testament passages such as James 3⁹ and I Corinthians 11⁷. While the biblical references seem few the volume of non-biblical literature is expansive both in terms of number and time. From the times of the early church, doctors of theology such as Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine have expounded this concept in their works, as have theologians such as Pannenberg² and Moltmann³ in the present time. The concept has also found its significance in important church documents such as *Gaudium Et Spes* of the Roman Catholic Church and even the Covenant on Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation of the World Council of Churches. Indian Theologians such as Abhishiktananda⁴ have also explored the depths of its meaning while at the same time the concept also has a special place for feminist theologians.⁵ Significantly, the idea of the image of God remains absent from the specific language of the Barmen Declaration, The Belhar Confession, and the Accra Confession. For the WCRC, though, the language of the image of God has been retained through the work on gender justice with both manuals on that were recently produced on the subject by the WARC/WCRC retaining the title of the Image of God.

The effort of this essay, however, will not be to offer a historical analysis of how the concept has been used over time and context, nor will it attempt an exegesis of the relevant passages. Rather, it will seek to raise certain theological themes and concepts that have arisen out of the concept of the Imago Dei and will make an attempt to draw out an understanding of these for a relevant Christian anthropology for our times. In doing so, the limitation of this essay is that it is a selective reading of both the biblical texts and the theological history of the term, picking up only those issues that it feels important for a relevant understanding of the human person in our present times.

2 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985) pp. 43 - 74.

3 Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985) pp. 215 - 244.

4 Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974) pp. 163 - 174.

5 Cf. Chung Hyun Kyung, “To Be Human Is to Be Created in God’s Image” in Urusula King ed. *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (London/Maryknoll: SPCK/Orbis Books, 1994) pp. 251 - 259.

The Image of God is indicative of a special designation of human beings.

While there is considerable debate of what the term ‘the Image of God’ could indicate, of one thing we can be certain is that the concept is indicative of a special designation of human beings. In the Genesis creation narratives we find that the creation of humans is distinct from the creation of the other creatures on two grounds: Firstly we note that while the other creatures are created after their own kind, it is only humans that are created in the image of God. Secondly we note that while the rest of creation is created by the word of God, it is only humans that are created by the special resolve of God. Moltmann while making this point to us says, “Human beings come into being, not through God’s creative word but out of his special resolve.”⁶ We must understand the image of God in humans is a characteristic that separates us from all of creation. Of course this understanding of humans being separate and even over and above creation has had its negative and disastrous implications, a point that we will deal with later, but the point that has to be made here is that at least for the creation narratives, humans are to be distinguished from the animals. This point of course has serious implications for conceptions of humanity that derive themselves from using biology as ideology. It immediately brings into question the entire ideology of social Darwinism. There can hardly be any doubt that Darwin’s theory of evolution has had its social significance for the human community. The theory of the survival of the species has not only had its relevance for the animal kingdom but it is often applied to the human community as well as a justification of the fact that the strong will thrive while the weak perish. Insights from the animal kingdom are often used to justify this kind of position. Therefore the displacement of tribes and the usurpation of tribal lands is justified, saying that some will have to bear the cost of development. The ideology of competition and the devastating effect it has on the poor and the marginalized is also justified using similar arguments. But the use of biology as ideology is not only restricted to social Darwinism: feminists have long struggled against this use of biology as ideology while insisting that gender roles are a matter of social construct and are not natural. Among the many excuses that are offered for patriarchy is of course that similar tendencies are to be found among the animals. The striking point of the Genesis narratives is of course that humans are not animals and therefore analogies between the animal kingdom and humankind cannot be made. Just because a particular behavior is prevalent among animals it does not mean that the same is natural for humans. After all, humans are distinguished from the rest of creation because they are created in the image of God.

⁶ Moltmann *Op. Cit.*, p. 217.



Moreover, if anything, human life is marked by a struggle against the confines of biology. We fight disease and seek to resist death. Moreover, as Hume is wont to remind us, nature is more often about what is rather than what ought to be, to make an easy leap between the two is fraught with difficulty. The idea of the Image of God is moral and ethical, it points us more towards the what ought to be rather than what is⁷. This has its implications in how we respond to natural theology, which seems to have its roots in a certain forms of biological determinism. Inasmuch as natural theology claims to be rooted in certain understandings of what is “natural” to the human, we need to be suspicious of natural theology itself.

The Image of God is only realized in the context of community. It is significant that Genesis 1²⁷ reads “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.” What is being indicated to us here is of course that the totality of who God is cannot be represented by a single human. In fact the image of God as a community of being as represented in the three persons of the trinity can only be represented in human community as a totality. That is to say that no one human or even a set of humans can claim that they are made in the image of God or are God’s representatives here on earth. Rather only the whole of humanity together can claim that they are in the image of God together. This has serious implications for our world today. The implication being that God is best represented by diversity: Only the whole diversity of the world in terms of different cultures, gender, sexual orientation, and religious experience can represent who God is. This means that no culture, gender, sexual orientation, or religious experience can claim superiority over another. It is only together that all of them represent who God is.

This manner of thinking also says something to us about the character of God, for long patriarchal religious traditions have seen God in exclusively male terms. This is, of course, the use of religion as ideology, where male dominance on earth is justified because of a male Father in heaven. But to claim that the image of God is represented in human community is also to say that God cannot only be represented by one gender. In fact the biblical text is very specific about this. God can only be represented by the whole spectrum of what we understand to be gender; therefore, seeing God as only male is a distortion of who God is and is only a partial understanding of God. In traditional Christianity, idolatry is defined as either making God what God is not or making only a part of God into the whole of God. If we see God in only male terms then we are guilty of the sin of idolatry.

⁷ Cf. Brandon Ambrosino, “The Invention of ‘Heterosexuality’” <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170315-the-invention-of-heterosexuality> accessed on 20th March 2017.

If image of God can only be understood in the context of community, then we must also understand that the image of God also speaks about sustaining this community. A much neglected text in the understanding of the biblical terminology of the image of God is Gen. 9⁶, which says “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed: for in his own image God made humankind.” While this text has often been used to show that the image of God continues after the fall, the ethical implications of this text are not that often looked into. The obvious implication of the text is that human blood cannot be shed because humans are made in the image of God. This obviously shows us that not only is God’s image best represented by community, but also that the image of God is an imperative for us to uphold and sustain human community and not destroy it by bloodshed. Of course, Jesus takes this one step further when he says that even despising another human is equated as murder and is therefore against the image of God in that person. In the terms of Jesus, then, hatred and prejudice are also factors that do not sustain community but rather destroy the image of God in humans.

The Image of God is indicative of a special relationship between God and humans. Not only is the image of God indicative of a special designation of humans over and above the animals, but it is also indicative of a special relationship that humans have with God. To claim that humans are made in the image of God is also for us to claim that to be able to understand God, we must look at humans. This is, of course, a thought that has echoed throughout the ages of the Church; the early Church doctors have spoken about the fact that human beings created in the image of God are contemplative beings.⁸ Abhishiktananda the Indian theologian tells us that “If man is really made in the image of God, then it will be through knowing himself as he most truly is that he will be enabled to discover at least something of the mystery of him whose image he is”⁹. The basic background to this is a Greek thought that would claim that “like knows like” and therefore humans, being in the image of God, are able to understand God in a special way. Asian feminists, however, do not see this in an individual sense but more in a collective way. Chung Hyun Kyung, the Asian feminist theologian, informs us that for Asian women God is defined by their experience of suffering and hope. For her, the key to theology is anthropology and not the other way around. In this sense the collective experience of the suffering of Asian women and the hope that they have in their struggle for liberation defines who God is for Asian women. Therefore, for Asian women, God is not the ultimate reality or the

8 Lars Thunberg *Op. Cit.*, p. 304.

9 Abhishiktananda *Op. Cit.*, p. 163.



prime mover who does not get involved with creation; rather God is a God who takes the sides of the poor in history, a God who struggles for justice, a God who is met in the struggle for justice¹⁰.

Being in the Image of God offers a sense of power to humans. Biblical scholars inform us that the concept of the Image of God comes from an Egyptian royal theology. This theology would state that the Pharaoh—and only the Pharaoh—is in the image of God on earth; the Pharaoh is God’s representative and reflection. The biblical text is a democratization of this view. It subverts this royal ideology and democratizes it by claiming that it is not only royalty who are in the image of God, but that all of humanity is made in the image of God. This is, of course, offers a sense of power and self-worth to humans. It is no wonder that the idea of Image of God has an important in place in various liberation theologies. Particularly in the feminist movement, the claim of being in God’s Image has long been a point of political issue. This is seen in Asian feminism with the Asian Women’s Resource Centre for Culture and Theology even bringing out a journal titled *In God’s Image*. While it is, of course, good that we understand that all are made in the image of God and not only men or the upper castes, one also has to admit that there are certain dangers related to issue of the Image of God offering a certain sense of power.

Firstly it must be clarified that the danger of claiming to be in God’s image can lead to humans becoming monsters. While this is of course not true of oppressed and marginalized groups making this claim, it definitely is a danger when groups who are in power make this claim. This then has the danger of humans acting like God. This was also a danger that is noted in the creation narrative itself, where humans who are made in the image of God try to become like God. The theme of creation attempting to become like its creator and its subsequent dangers is a recurrent one in literature. Frankenstein, Isaac Asimov’s *I, Robot*, and the Terminator trilogy are all examples of this. In our times, we have the very real example of the American president believing that he is God’s representative here on earth and carrying out the justice of God with disastrous consequences. The same can be said of groups and communities who believe themselves to be God’s chosen. To claim to be in the image of God can, therefore, have its negative fallout when coupled with political and economic power.

The second danger of claiming to be in the image of God is that this power is often directed towards nature. Lynn White, the historian of medieval technology, wrote a very short article on how the present environmental crisis has its roots in

¹⁰ Chung Hyun Kyung *Op. Cit.*, p. 252.

western Christianity. He makes the claim that interpretations of the Genesis claims of being made in the image of God and dominating the earth lie at the root of the environmental crisis.¹¹ While this claim has been adequately contested as being too monocausal and that White has been hasty in his judgment to lay the entire global environmental crisis at the feet of Western Christianity, one cannot also deny that there are interpretations of this manner which exist and have had this negative fallout.

The question we have to answer is how to we perceive the power of being in the image of God in an appropriate way in our contexts today. One approach of course would be to reinterpret what is meant by the term “dominate” in the biblical text. T. Hembrom, for example, shows us that the biblical injunction to dominate does not “convey any meaning of destruction or extermination rather they suggest ‘to keep under control’ something so that it does not bring harm to another.”¹²

The approach of the early church doctors gives us another point of view when they speak of a distinction between domination as status and domination as activity. To be able to rule is one thing, to actually do so is another.¹³ Therefore we understand ourselves as being in the image of God, but do not act on the power that could result from such an understanding. Of course it should be mentioned that the early church doctors also had the understanding that humans could not act on this as a result of the fall.

A third approach, of course, and probably the best one, would be to link domination and the image of God. This view would see that humans are to dominate in the sense that God would dominate. That is to say, humans are really called into a care and stewardship of nature rather than to exploit it for their own material benefit. But maybe we need to nuance domination and stewardship a little more complexly.

Perhaps we have to take a completely alternative route to understand that nature is both benevolent and cruel at the same time, that the ideas of stewardship of nature or even seemingly benign images of nature as mother are not always representative of how marginal communities who live on the edge of nature’s wrath view her. In the area south of where I live in Kolkata are the Sunderbans, the place where the river Ganges unravels into the sea in both India and Bangladesh. The area is home to a diverse body of plant and animal species and is under deep ecological threat due to rising sea levels caused by global warming. Marginal communities in this

11 Cf. Lynn White, “The Religious Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” in *Science* 155, 167, pp. 1203 - 1207.

12 T. Hembrom, *The Santals: Anthropological – Theological Reflections on Santali and Biblical Creation Traditions* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1996) p. 169.

13 Lars Thunberg *Op. Cit.*, p. 301.



area have cosmology that is appreciative of both the benevolence and dangers of nature. On the one hand, there is the benevolent goddess Bonbibi who is responsible for fertility, spring, and the honey that comes in the honeycombs. Her arch rival is Dakhin Rai, who is represented by the Bengal Tiger. Though the tiger itself is a threatened species, the number of people being killed by the Royal Bengal Tiger in this area suggests that to the natives of the Sunderbans, neither the Tiger nor nature is viewed as being absolutely benevolent. Those whose lives are under constant threat because of rising sea levels and the ravages of the tiger are able to understand nature both as hospitable as well as dangerous, wonderfully benevolent as well as viciously cruel. In such a context, the domination of nature is mandated along with a submission to it.

Perhaps then the implications we can draw away from this is that we need to delink the idea of the image of God from power or at least conceive it differently. In fact it can be argued that the lineage of the Imago Dei with absolutist power is an imperial ideology which seeks to legitimize power. The World Council of Churches document "A Church of All and for All" therefore calls us to delink the idea of the Imago Dei from perfection and root it in community, diversity, and relationship instead.

Christological Implications of the Image of God

There is an ancient view that it is Christ who is truly in the image of God. Christ is the both the archetype and prototype of the image of God. If this is true, then we are called into an imitation of Christ, who is the true image of God. Then we should use power in the sense that Christ used it that is to give it up, to opt for powerlessness. The powerlessness that Christ calls us into is not a meek submission to those who rule and abuse their status as being in the image of God, rather it is a protest against this abuse of power. There is a greater power in this powerlessness that acts as a subversive movement against all who use power to abuse others and nature.

Further we must ask the question who are in the image of Christ in the world? Of course we are all called to be imitators of Christ, but Matthew 25 also speaks of Christ being found in the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, and those in prison. The implication for us is that the image of Christ and therefore also the true image of God is to be found in the marginalized and in the dispossessed. Therefore we can say that the true image of God today is found in the many starving Dalits in our country, that the image of God is found in the many women all over the world who have to walk long distances in search of water for their families, that the image of God is found in the prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.

Image of God as a Project

Lastly, I would like to conclude this essay by pointing to an old debate on the relationship between the words “image” and “likeness” that are used in Gen. 1²⁶,²⁷. Biblical scholars assure us that the words are used synonymously and that too much should not be made of the two different words that are used here. Yet this has not prevented theologians from making all kinds of distinctions between the two and wrestling to expose theological insights from both of them. Among those who have made distinctions between these words is Irenaeus, in fact he may have been the first to make such a distinction. To Irenaeus, image is not a perfection but rather a task whose fulfillment is found in likeness.¹⁴ This gives us the indication that being in the image and likeness of God is not to be understood as a gift that is given to humans; rather it is a goal to which we should aspire. The image of God then becomes a project that all of humanity are called to participate in so that we may become more like God. Of course this is not in the sense of becoming rulers on or even of the earth, but rather that we are called to build and sustain community and diversity. That we do not aspire to power but, taking the example of Christ, we count equality with God nothing to be grasped, but empty ourselves, taking the form of a slave taking human likeness. To be in the image of God is a project wherein we do not try to become gods on the earth but rather, in imitation of Christ, become more human.

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14 Ibid. p. 298.



Gender Justice: Who speaks for whom?

Amritha Bosi Perumalla

“Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization”

—*Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak?*

A “Girls-Council” constituted by only men in Saudi Arabia; the Planned Parenthood programme that provides women access to safe health-care options and choice being defunded by a predominantly all-white male Trump cabinet; the ban on headscarves supported by male politicians in several European countries: these are only a few examples of issues where “women” have been spoken for by voices that represent, re-present, and replicate the unjust structures of power that are present in our world today.

The Women’s March, Black Lives Matter, A Day without a Woman, and Thursdays in Black are examples of few of the many “voices” that counter these masculinized narratives of power, domination, and authority. Through this essay, I hope to shed light on the “voices” that speak for gender justice and through this exercise help us to hear our own “voices”—examining the construction of how we speak and for whom we speak. It is a kind of introspection of how our own thought processes are influenced by privilege, oppression, power, and experience. It is a directive for us to be aware of how our “voices” are constructed and how they therefore manifest in our actions.

In this essay, I am going to first draw on the Women’s March on Washington held in January 2017. I write about this “voice” not only because of its recent occurrence but because it represents the coming together of millions of “voices” in the U.S. and all over the world—protesting not only against the recently elected U.S. president, but marching also to bring to light the promotion of women’s rights, addressing racial inequalities, LGBTQ abuse, health-care reform, and climate change. It was protesting in a unified “voice” against the suffering of myriad of voices.

I am also going to draw on the Accra Confession of the World Communion of Reformed Churches as it is a “voice” that responds to the “groans of creation”—it laments the suffering of people and calls for “speaking” and renewing our

commitment to the work of justice. This “voice” represents the faith commitment of the member churches of the WCRC.

I will engage these two “voices” through the perspectives of intersectionality, and subalternity to enable us to gain a deeper insight into gender and in turn our own voices as we stand up and speak up against gender injustice.

The Women’s March – History and Objectives

The Women’s March, initially called “Million Women March,” was a reaction to the election campaign and political views of the new president of the United States. Started as the “Women’s March on Washington,” this women-led movement became a worldwide event “bringing together people of all genders, ages, races, cultures, political affiliations and backgrounds.”¹ Protesting also against the current political leadership in the U.S., these women marched for a “government that is based on the principles of liberty and justice for all”² and one amongst their several principles is the belief in the principle of Gender Justice. It was a call for women all over the U.S. to show not only their resistance and opposition to the political climate, but also be more proactive about women’s rights. It was a call to take “a stand on social justice and human rights issues ranging from race, ethnicity, gender, religion, immigration and healthcare.”³

Thus, on 21 January 2017, over 5 million people took part in the “Women’s March” all over the globe—679 sister marches in the U.S. and 137 marches outside the U.S.⁴ It was the largest single-day demonstration in U.S. history.⁵ The campaign did not end on that day. Instead it launched many “Calls for Action”—*10 Actions/100 Days including writing postcards to Congress, gathering in neighborhoods known as “Huddles,” and attending and participating in Town Hall or District Congressional Meetings known as “Hear our Voice.” The campaign also called for “A Day Without a Woman” on International Women’s Day, March 8 as a demonstration of economic solidarity for women and all gender-oppressed people.*⁶

The aim of the march is to create a social movement—a movement that believes that women’s rights are human rights and human rights are women’s rights,

1 <https://www.womensmarch.com/mission/> Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles, pg. 1.

2 Ibid.

3 Susan Chira and Yamiche Alcindor, “Defiant Voices Flood US Cities as Women Rally for Rights,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2017.

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_2017_Women’s_March_locations#Worldwide

5 Ibid.

6 <https://www.womensmarch.com/womensday/>.



that Gender Justice is Racial Justice is Economic Justice is Environmental Justice. These were the tenets of the March on Washington and these are “the first steps towards unifying communities, grounded in new relationships, to create change from the grassroots level up.”⁷

The Accra Confession

The Women’s March highlighted yet again the interconnectedness and intersectionality of the many issues that continue to face women all over the globe. This is also observed in the Accra Confession. The twenty-fourth General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches adopted the Accra Confession in 2004. “It is based on the theological conviction that the economic and ecological injustices of today’s global economy require the Reformed family to respond as a matter of faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” It states, “Justice is a matter of faith, that matters of economic and ecological justice are not only social, political and moral issues, they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church. Being faithful to God’s covenant requires that individual Christians and the churches take a stand against current economic and environmental injustices.”⁸ The Accra Confession will continue to be the foundation on which the WCRC tackles issue of injustice in today’s world.⁹

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), at whose General Council this Confession was adopted, united with the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) in 2010 at the General Council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, together forming the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) whose work on justice, especially gender justice, is heavily influenced by the Accra Confession. In the years following the adaptation of the Accra Confession, the WCRC and its member Churches have engaged with the continuing negative impact of neoliberal globalization.

Through global and bi-regional consultations, the member churches of the WCRC have ascertained that there is “the convergence of interconnected and complex issues such as global warming and extreme climate disasters, increased nationalism and non-state players affecting global and regional politics, sustained militarization, and the shift in global political and economic powers, agri-business, and unjust trade agreements.”¹⁰ Though we have seen

⁷ <https://www.womensmarch.com/mission/>.

⁸ <http://wrc.ch/accra>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ <http://wrc.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Accra-GlobalConsultationReport.pdf>.

the emergence of many social movements, “neoliberal economics, race and patriarchy have entangled.”¹¹ And as such, Gender Justice is Racial Justice is Economic Justice is Environmental Justice.

The Global Consultation held ten years after the Accra Confession realized the need to “address the effects of an unjust neoliberal economic system in a more integrated manner that analyzes and responds to these unjust social, political, and economic realities.”¹²

Intersectionality, Subalternity, and Power

To address these injustices in a more integrated manner, we require certain analytical and sociological tools in order to respond effectively and, more importantly, understand the many complexities in the overlapping of issues. One of these tools is the theory of intersectionality that has been gaining traction in the field of sociology in the past years. American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw first coined the term intersectionality in 1989. In her article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,”¹³ Crenshaw contends that there are “overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination.”¹⁴ She explores race and gender dimensions of violence against women of color.¹⁵ Though she contends that violence against women can not only be explained by the frameworks of race and gender, other factors like class or sexuality are critical in shaping the experience of women, especially women of color. There are “multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed.”¹⁶ These multiple grounds of identity cannot be observed separately and as such “intersectionality is not simply a view of personal identity, but rather an overarching analysis of power hierarchies present within identities.”¹⁷

Patricia Hill Collins uses Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality to “refer to the simultaneous overlapping of multiple forms of oppression.” She also asserts that people must “examine the intersection of race, class, and gender, and that

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* (1991): 1241-1299.

14 Ibid, 1241.

15 Ibid, 1242.

16 Ibid, 1244-1245.

17 Brittany Cooper, “Intersectionality, in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).



looking at each issue separately leads to missing a large part of the problem.”¹⁸ Recognizing different experiences of oppressed groups has led us to look at human rights and injustice through different perspectives. However, this has also led to “elites possess[ing] the power to legitimate knowledge that they define as theory as being universal, normative, and ideal.”¹⁹

It is this possession of legitimizing knowledge and thus power that Gayatri Spivak addresses in her famous essay, “Can the Subaltern speak?” Drawing from Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s term “subaltern,” the literary and postcolonial theorist Spivak contends that a subaltern is a person rendered without agency by social status and is at the margins of society.²⁰ She investigates how this “subaltern” is represented, how they voice their oppressions, and who speaks on their behalf. Her contention is the location of the person speaking on behalf of the “subaltern” and their construction of the identity of these oppressed groups of people. Speaking for the subaltern must acknowledge that the speakers’ subjectivity is constructed by discourses of power, position and relations.

Gender Justice

“We believe in Gender Justice. We must have the power to control our bodies and be free from gender norms, expectations and stereotypes. We must free ourselves and our society from the institution of awarding power, agency and resources disproportionately to masculinity to the exclusion of others”.²¹ —*Guiding Vision and Principles, Women’s March, 2017*

“We believe that God is a God of justice...God calls for just relationships with all creation...We believe that God calls us to stand with those who are victims of injustice.... We are called to stand against any form of injustice in the economy and the destruction of the environment...We reject any form of injustice which destroy right relations – gender, race, class, disability, or caste”²² — *Excerpts, Accra Confession, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2004*

18 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge 2004).

19 Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 1998), 344.

20 Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

21 Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles, Women’s March on Washington. pg.3.

22 <http://wcr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/TheAccraConfession-English.pdf>.

Gender is a highly contested term. The concept of gender can refer to the biological sex (i.e., being male, female, or intersex), to social structures (i.e., gender roles) or to gender identity.²³ Most commonly, the term gender is used to refer to the masculinity and femininity of a person, which is usually derived from the male or female sex of the person. The term “woman” is used interchangeably with reference to the female body and “man” with the male. By virtue of biological sex, a person is bestowed “masculine” or “feminine” attributes and behavioral traits, and as such gender is a social construct as it assigns the person a certain role and expectations derived from norms, values, and relations. Gender is not a binary—male or female, masculine or feminine, but instead the concept of gender is in itself intersectional and subaltern. Gender is neither universal nor cross-cultural. It is fluid, relative, and changes over time.

Gender is defined as the “socially constructed characteristics of women and men such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men.”²⁴ Analyzing gender addresses the inequalities that arise from different norms, roles, and relations, including unequal power relations. It also means evaluating the interaction of factors such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, education, or employment. Gender equality refers to “the equal chances or opportunities for groups of women and men to access and control social, economic, and political resources.”²⁵

When viewed through the lens of gender, both the Women’s March and Accra Confession highlight the entanglements that permeate this contested space. However, the attainment of justice, particularly Gender Justice, is central. What do we mean when we say Gender Justice or affirm women’s rights are human rights? When we use the term gender, are we referring to the male/female dichotomy or the intersectional social construct that transcends this binary arrangement of being woman/man and feminine/masculine?

Gender Justice refers not only to the distribution of justice with respect to gender, or irrespective of gender, or consciousness of gender—in whichever way we see *just*, it is the “institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation.”²⁶ It is the distribution of resources and opportunities to *each person*. It is the full

23 What do we mean by “sex” and “gender”? World Health Organization <http://apps.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/>.

24 <http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/en/>.

25 Ibid.

26 Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 39.



participation and inclusion of everyone in a society's major institutions, and the socially supported substantive opportunity for all to develop and exercise their capacities and realize their choices."²⁷ It is the "finding and putting into practice new ways to express and live out the uniqueness of bearing the image of God, fulfilling our responsibility of building and nurturing right, just and equal relationships between women, men and the earth."²⁸

"Women need to be seen, and to see themselves, as autonomous, free human beings capable of making their own choices, rather than being 'pushed around by the world.'"²⁹ How do we who speak for women, and how do we see "women"? With our tools of intersectionality, subalternity, and understanding of power hierarchies, do we view them as a collective group, as individual entities, as a collection of identities? When we speak about gender justice, do we construct our own version of an "oppressed social group" that needs saving or justice? Do we juxtapose the idea of justice for this group with an essentialist, universalist view of justice and/or compare with a dominant group?

When we speak of gender justice, we must also recognize that oppression is central category in our discourse on gender: oppression not just as injustices that some people suffer because of tyrannical power, but oppression through everyday practices. "Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules."³⁰ As Foucault suggests that "to understand the meaning and operation of power in modern society, we must look beyond the model of power and instead analyze the exercise of power as the effect of often liberal and 'humane' practices of education, bureaucratic administration, production and distribution of consumer goods, medicine, and so on. The conscious actions of individuals daily contribute to maintaining and reproducing oppression."

Justice here is recognition of the entangled historical, social, economic, political, and cultural roots in our institutions and its multiple manifestations. It is the understanding of our own inadequacy, our own self-critical reflexivity in how we enable these manifestations. And finally it is in the disabling of the very

27 Ibid, 173.

28 <http://wcrch.org/justice/gender-equality>.

29 Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi, eds., *Gender Justice, Development, and Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

30 Ibid, 41.

constraints, oppression, and structures of domination.

We who are speaking for those who cannot speak must be very aware of our own location in the discourse. Are we products of the power patriarchy/hierarchy? Are we consciously or unconsciously engaging in what Foucault terms “epistemic violence,” in that we reproduce the structures of power and oppression? When we speak on behalf of the “subaltern,” the “oppressed,” the “gendered,” are we speaking through our own experience or are we telling their story?

Lest the figure of the woman disappear into nothingness, let us be bold for change, let us listen to her, let us hear our voice, and let us make our voice be heard!

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Female Body as a Site of Violence: A Feminist Demand for a Paradigm Shift

JM Sharath Souseelya

"My name is Hagar. I am a silent victim of use and abuse. My womb is targeted to fulfil the selfish motives of my master's family." "My name is Sarah. My barren body turned into a threat to my identity in my family and the fear of the consequences disturbed my family's homeostasis." "We are two daughters of Lot. We are not considered as human beings but only possessions. Our virgin bodies are offered to perverts by our own father to protect his male guests." "I am Bathsheba. My beauty induced a curse into my life. The name of the curse is king. The royal power, in order to grab my body utterly destroyed my life. As a consequence I lost my husband and son and lived in the palace gripped with fear of death until my son became the king." "My name is Esther, my beautiful virgin body made me a silent victim of abuse and violence by two men, one of them abused me for his selfish gains while the other abused with all his royal power." "I am known as unnamed concubine. My story depicts not only the terrors of male power and brutality but also reveals the truth that how a female body has been used to serve many interests of the male. My master used my body as a chattel to protect himself from perverts and finally cut my body into twelve pieces."

My name is Rup Kanwar. On September 4, 1987, my 18-year-old young body is burnt alive on my husband's pyre in the name of Sati¹." "I am a 74-year-old nun, and I am gang-raped by six men because of communal hatred. I cannot understand why the patriarchal society places the honour of the community in the vagina of the female body." "I am Premila Vaghela, 30-year-old surrogate mother. The unexpected health complications dragged me to death. I delivered the baby for a U.S.-based couple and left this world where the womb of a woman is commercialised." "My name is Jyothi Singh, a 24-year-old paramedical student; the world called me Nirbhaya. I am terribly raped in a moving bus by six men who viciously tortured my body by inserting an iron rod into my gut and pulled out organs from my stomach. And I died after 16 days from severe injuries." "I am Challi Kale, a 20-year-old victim of brutal domestic violence. I went through a terrible torture by my in-laws and husband. My eyes are gouged out and I lost my vision. I am still undergoing surgeries to restore my eyesight." "I am Neha, 26 years old. I am tortured and killed by my in-laws and husband for dowry." "I am

¹ Sati is a Hindu practice in India, the burning to death of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre. In 1829 under the British government rule, with the initiation of Christian missionaries and some social reformers, it had been banned. Nevertheless, it is still regarded by some fundamental Hindu as the ultimate form of womanly devotion and sacrifice.

Bhagawati, a 39-year-old marital rape survivor. I curse myself for being born in a society where marital rape is normalised and sex is seen as a duty of a woman to perform to make the husband happy. I am not a human being for my husband. I am treated like a sex toy. He would insert things inside me, bite me, and slap me. Even during my menstruation he would not spare me." "My name is Guddi, a sex worker in Kamathipura, the notorious brothel in the red light district in Mumbai. At the age of 11, my parents were lured by our neighbour, who promised me well-paid domestic work; they handed me over to her. She sold me to a brothel. I am broken physically and mentally. I am surviving counting my days to die, which is the only way to be liberated from this painful life." "I am Monika, 19 years old. I am hanged and cremated by my parents for falling in love with a man who belongs to a lower caste. Still it's a question for me that why the patriarchal society considers the female body as a gateway of caste and family honour."

Kochurani Abraham states that in India the expression "violence" has become a synonym for women.² Kalpana Kannabiran also says, bringing out the situation of women in India, that for women violence is the normal pattern of life from birth till death. Women in patriarchal societies like India have never been considered as human beings, but are treated as the objects of patriarchal violence and abuse. They are regular targets of domestic violence, brutal rape, marital rape, dowry deaths, honour killings, war, communal hatred, caste discrimination and so on. It is also apparent that violence against women does not merely come in the form of physical abuse but it manifests in all kinds of harassment, humiliation, marginalization, and discrimination. In this way, women are subjected continuously to social, cultural, religious, political, economic, verbal, physical, psychological, and sexual violence.

However, whatever the form of violence, the core point of violence is the female body. Furthermore, feminist concerns view the body of the woman as a site of violence, abuse, exclusion, and marginalization in the patriarchal society. Thus, the body is the vital point to analyse the issue of violence against women. In this context, the female body has to be understood from the sociological perspective in the patriarchal context through the categories of patriarchal ideologies since the female body is not solely a biological entity but also a social construct. Simone De Beauvoir in her book *Second Sex* carries out a thought that patriarchal social institutions carve the female body. She also states "the *female* is a biological or organic condition and *femininity* is the socially imposed concept."³

² Shalini Mulackal & Roy Lazer eds., *Violence in Today's Society Indian Theological Reflections* (Bangalore: Indian Theological Associations, 2012), 22.

³ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), 32.



The patriarchal institutional construct and control over female body is itself a violence and obviously turns as violence to serve the patriarchal interests. Feminism demonstrates that violence against women is pervasive and that it is the product of patriarchal culture in which men control both "social institutions" and "female bodies."⁴ It relatively conveys that patriarchy "constructs" and "controls" both social institutions and female body. The construction of body is based on patriarchal social structure. Michel Foucault goes further and offers a way to look at the interplay of social control of female body in relation to power. He points that how the body became the focus of power and was "disciplined" and "trained" to function.⁵ On the other hand, feminism, to analyse the violence, underlines the importance of women's experience as the primary source. In this regard, according to Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar, the powerful tool to analyse women's experiences is the "body" of the woman. She continues to say that "this analysis involves searching for an interface between the 'lived body' and the 'inscribed body' and between the construction of the identity of a woman and the essential patriarchal ideologies through which the patriarchal social control gets perpetuated."⁶

Violence in the Name of Idealism

The female body is fabricated with the notion of ideal womanhood. It not only controls woman's normal bodily appetite but also monitors her role, identity, space, mobility, growth, reproductivity, and sexuality. The notion of ideal womanhood subjects woman to several levels of control: self-control of the senses and desires, which would mean self-control over every kind of bodily appetite, generating the ability to suffer and sacrifice.⁷

Accordingly, the whole concept of an ideal woman that awfully manipulates female body is visible in wife and mother. The institution of marriage promotes the impression that a woman's body is the property of man. In the patriarchal society like the Indian society, the husband and wife relationship is seen as

4 Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory; Second edition* (Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 293.

5 Anjali Widge "Patriarchy, Social Control and Female Body," *Social Action*, 25.

6 Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar, "Significance of the 'Body' in Feminist Theological Discourse," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 5/2 (Dec, 2001), 83.

7 Dominique S. Verma ed., *Memories of the Second Sex Gender and Sexuality in Women's writing* (Mumbai: Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2000), 83.

that of a *swami and dasi* (owner and servant).⁸ Almost all religions of patriarchal culture reinforce the view of man's complete ownership of the woman's body through marriage. The husband is the custodian of her body while she needs to be careful of the way she dresses, behaves, and generates life. In short "what she does with her body" is decided by the male norms. C.S. Lakshmi in her article "Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation" perceives the association of social control with female body through the institution of marriage. This association perceives that female bodies are meant to work. They are expected to be burdened with household duties without rest. That makes a perfect woman by being an ideal woman.⁹ Moreover the work that women do in the house is never considered as work.

The sexuality of the female body is tied to the reproductive process. Her sexuality is not for her but for her husband. In fact, woman is not made to enjoy sexuality. The woman is not expected to talk of sexuality. Her sexuality is only for procreation and to satisfy her husband.¹⁰ Traditional sex roles and socialization teach women that their bodies are asexual, they should not engage in sex for pleasure but only for the sake of childbearing and motherhood, and men are the only sexual beings and so men may engage in sex for the pleasure of it.¹¹ Gabriel Dietrich writes, "by definition, a woman's physical existence does not lie under her own control. She is meant to pour her love out to her children, and to concentrate all her physical desire on marriage and on her husband. Even in this relationship, it is not her well-being but invariably his that counts. The good wife is still the one who, as depicted in folklore, carries her bedridden husband to the brothel house because he desires so or as an alternative behaves like a prostitute in bed if he so desires. The common denominator here is denial of a woman's subjectivity, self-respect, and self-determination."¹² Virtually, it is admirable for an ideal woman to silently hand over her body to the husband for all kinds of violence, torture for his sexual gratification, and, ultimately, harassment, which makes her an ideal woman.

8 The images of ownership universal and originated in patriarchal feudalism. The husband becomes the owner of the body of his wife through marriage. Symbolically this relationship is viewed as field and master where he ploughs this field and sows his seed in order to bring forth his progeny to make the field productive.

9 Dominique S. Verma ed., *Memories of the Second Sex Gender and Sexuality in Women's writing*. 83.

10 Prasanna Kumari ed *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis*. (Chennai: Gurukul Summer Institute 1998), 424.

11 Lalrinawmi Ralte ed, *Envisioning a New Heaven and New Earth* (Delhi: NCCI/ISPCK), 271.

12 Gabriel Dietrich, *Women's Movement in India: Conceptual and Religious Reflections*, (Bangalore: Breakthrough Publications, 1988). 93.



Another vital notion that makes a woman's life miserable is motherhood. The ultimate meaning, dignity, and worth of the female body is tied with motherhood. They both are so interlinked with each other and equated that motherhood is seen as the fullness of womanhood. The patriarchal power relations dictated the idealization of women as mothers, the romanticisation of motherhood and the attribution of normative quality to motherhood. Anything that disrupts this power relationship is seen as deviant and criminal. Adrienne Rich makes a statement on the myth of motherhood: "Woman's status as child bearer having been made into a major fact of her life and terms like 'barren' or 'childless' serving as markers of negation with no male analogue like 'non-father', the bodies of women become sites for high-tech reproductive technology." The dignity, honor, and identity of a woman in society and family depends on the fertility of her womb. Conboy exposes rightly the plight of a woman in the name of motherhood. It is the fault of the woman if she cannot bear a male child or even if she remains barren. Barren body is one of the potent causes of domestic violence. Moreover, the "infertile body" has to live with all the social stigma attached to being barren. The barren woman is considered as inauspicious at all social and religious functions. Thus the barren woman becomes the victim of domestic violence and also denied in public space.¹³

Violence in the Name of "Shame and Honour"

The female body is counted as a site of "honor" and "shame." These two notions constantly hang on the sexual purity of the female body. The female body is sacred because it is the site of "honor" of the family and the community. At the same time the female body is a threat to the honor of the family, eventually it becomes a site of "shame." These two notions attend the patriarchal intention of considering the female body as inferior. Therefore, the socially constructed and legitimized gender inequality of woman is structured biologically. For instance, the raped woman or the woman whose body has been made available to men other than her husband will be rejected by the family and the society because she is a "defiled woman." As a result, she has no place in the socioreligious framework of respectability. In the case of rape the best way to retain her honour is marrying her molester so that she still retains the one-man norm and her chastity. It conveys the notion of ownership of woman's body: The man who touches her body first will become the owner of that body. It is better if she lives with, honors, and obeys her molester, never mind if it's a double victimization.¹⁴

¹³ Metti Amritham *Women in India Negotiating Body Reclaiming Agency*, (Delhi:ISPCK,2011) 114.

¹⁴ Prasanna Kumari, ed., *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis*, (Chennai: Gurukul Summer Institute 1998), 423-424.

Therefore, it is a respectability based on sanctity and judged with reference to violation of a woman's body.¹⁵ Subsequently, this concept restrains her territory, pushing her body under constant supervision of family and society. It curbs her mobility, freedom, and opportunities for education and employment. Susan Griffin also speaks in similar lines about the fear of rape, that the threat of rape is used to deny women employment. The fear of rape keeps women off the streets at night, keeps them at home, keeps them passive and modest for fear that they be thought provocative."¹⁶

Further, virginity and chastity are the paramount required models of character for the female body. It is measured as the power of womanhood and it carries social honor to her family. Women have to be chaste before and after marriage. They have to be virgins before marriage. Since the "honor" of the family and community depends upon and is connected to her chastity, it is no wonder that in some instances like communal violence and caste conflicts her body becomes a site for rape and retribution. Kamla Bhasin, an Indian feminist and activist furiously reacts on the patriarchal notion of "shame and honour," saying, "Rape will not defile the honour of a woman or her community. Why does the society place the honour of community in a woman's vagina?" The rape of a 70-year-old nun and rapes on women in Kandhamal clearly state that women's bodies are viewed as possessions to dishonour the pride of other men. Susan Griffin exposes this fact saying that in "raping another's man's woman a man may aggrandise his own manhood and concurrently reduce that of another man."¹⁷

The notion of "shame and honour" also leads to target female body for "honour killing." Uma Chakrabarthy in her book *Gendering the Caste* brings to the light the nexus between caste and patriarchy and how they both control the body and sexuality of woman. She states that women's bodies are seen as gateways of the caste system.¹⁸ Thus it becomes important to guard women's sexuality as it is integral to the maintenance of patriarchy. A close look will reveal that caste and gender work together to circumscribe women's sexuality in further ways.¹⁹ "The Vedic texts, for instance Sathapatha Brahmana, expresses fears regarding the sexuality of women not directly under the control of men, especially husbands."²⁰

15 Jasbir Jain, "The Taboos of Dharma," *Memories of the Second Sex Gender and Sexuality in Women's Writing*, 91.

16 Susan Griffin, *Rape: The Power of Consciousness*, (London: Harper&Row Publishers, 1979), 23.

17 Susan Griffin, *Rape: The Power of Consciousness* (London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), 17.

18 Uma Chakrabarthy, *Gendering Caste; Through a Feminist Lens* (Calcutta: STREE, 2006), 37.

19 Meenakshi Thapan, *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 315.

20 Uma Chakrabarthy, *Gendering Caste; Through a Feminist Lens*, 43.



Any woman who breaches the patriarchal code of sexuality is seen as a serious breach of honour and a source of a great shame to the men in the community and anyone who breaches or brings dishonour or shame will be severely chastised.²¹ These notions will bring the woman's body into the discipline of patriarchy.

Violence in the name of Purity and Pollution

In the Indian culture, the female body is considered as auspicious and impure, at once deployed as an instrument for the regulation of patriarchy. These two aspects of femininity are conjoined yet contravened in the way they are conciliated. Perhaps one of the smartest techniques of the patriarchy is labelling menstruation, and childbirth as “disorders” and “impure.” The menstrual blood represents an uncontrollable and natural function of the body. But the patriarchal culture has ascribed the label of pollution and impurity rather than recognizing it as an organic part of woman's bodily experience. Thus woman's natural bodily experience is forced into the analyses within the conceptual framework of predetermined ideas of impurity.

Moreover, religious rituals, rites, symbols, taboos, and cultural beliefs under the patriarchal system give form to the analysis of impurity of female body.²² Any religious tradition pushes women to margins considering them “impure” based on the discharge of the menstrual blood. Women are, during this period, forbidden from certain domestic, religious, and social activities.²³ The Bible is not an exception to this kind of marginalization. Biblical male-dominated law provided certain rules to exclude women from the mainstream realms during that period.²⁴ The major symbolism that is used to explain women's marginalization is the ideology of *the pure and the polluted*.

21 Anosh Malekar, “Knot of Death”, *The Week* (August 26, 2001).

22 In South Indian villages there is a practice of celebrating the girl's first menstruation as the indication that the auspicious days are finished in her life and her body is impure now on. The puberty rite is preoccupied with purification of the girl, the house, and even the village. It's not only woman's bodily impurity but her social and cultural impurity. It is also an indication to the village that her body is a threat to the family honor.

23 According to Hindu mythology women during their menstrual period are not permitted to cook or serve food, the husband should not sleep on the same bed or have sexual intercourse with his wife during her period, conversation with them is forbidden to Brahmins, and they are not allowed to enter into the temple or participate any religious and social activities.

24 Woman is seen as a period of uncleanness (Lev15:19 18:19). During menstruation they are forbidden from doing some domestic and religious activities. Everything that she comes into contact during this period also becomes unclean and has to go through the process of cleansing through washing. A man should not have sex with her during this period (Lev 18:19). Apart from menstruation if a woman has a discharge she shall continue in uncleanness and she pollutes everything that she comes into contact. The same precaution done for menstruation is also done for such discharge.

Among the many attempts that have been made to explain the origin of this notion, Mary Douglas's work stands out. Douglas's attempt to expose the origin of the whole phenomena of purity and pollution on the basis of order and disorder is noteworthy.²⁵ Gnana Robinson explores Douglas's work and comprehends it saying that her work is evident in the case of rape victims being seen as "unclean" and "dishonoured," which is the result of the notion of the *purity and pollution*.²⁶ Now, it is clear that the order and disorder classification is contrived based on patriarchal construction in favour of male values. It characterized in line with the patriarchal values of what is "normal body" or "pure body." The normal and natural bodily processes which differ from those of the male body are made "abnormal." When seen in this light, the female body appears to be something which should be "disciplined" in order to become "normal" and "sacred."

An Ecclesial View

The ecclesial view and the Christian tradition of the theology of the body is very paradoxical. Throughout the history of Christianity, the female body is viewed as inferior, a source of sin and a threat to man's spirituality. Christianity under the philosophical dualism negated the body as something low while exalting the soul as high. This theology views the female body as a dangerous source of uncleanness and the "arsonists of sacred places." It is also considered as the entity competing with God in winning souls of men. With this was connected to the whole interpretation of the story of Genesis wherein the woman becomes the tempting Eve, deflecting man from his spiritual pursuit. This stage led to the emergence of a body-denying theology.²⁷

From the beginning, the biblical interpreters shaped the image of woman in theology in patriarchal terms and denounced women in strong terms as wicked and inferior. One prominent belief that the medieval Christianity promoted is that women are responsible for sin in the world. They are a continuing source of sin in the world since they seduce men away from the "heights" of mind and spirit to a lower concern for physical satisfaction and pleasure.²⁸ Thomas Aquinas

25 She says "'Dirt' is seen as an element of impurity essentially based on the concept of 'disorder.' 'Dirt' offends against 'order' ...Dirt or pollution is a matter of something that is 'out of place'... Dirt is a by-product of systematic ordering and classification of matter, insofar as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism." Mary D. Pellauer ed., *Sexual assault and abuse, a handbook for clergy and religious professionals* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1987), 89.

26 Prasanna Kumari, *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis*, 323.

27 Mitti Amrutham, *Women in India Negotiating Body Reclaiming Agency*, 154.

28 Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story; Women in Christian Tradition*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 37.



and others in medieval Christianity propagated that women are more sensual than men and more oriented toward the functions and appetite of human body. Aquinas, based on Greek ideas, added that women are “defective human beings.” Consequently, the fear of women and their power to cause lust and sin in men permeated theology. The female body was equated with insatiable sexuality and identified as the source of irrational demonic temptation. At a certain point of time in Christian history, women were kept out of public gaze because the very sight of the woman’s body would arouse in men lust, causing discord, violence, adultery, and revenge.²⁹

The present day church and its teaching, influenced by the biased theology and misinterpretations, promotes the image of the female body as the site of impurity and as the site of marginalization, victimization, domestication, and objectification. It resulted in marginalising women from leadership roles. Rose Mary Redford Reuther identifies three important areas in which women have been marginalized in the Church: sacramental celebrations, theological education, and ecclesial administration, which result in the marginalization from clericalism and leadership roles. The obvious reason for this exclusion is the conventional perception formed by the one-sided interpretations of the scripture on the notion of the “female body.” This kind of interpretation is not surprising, because the Bible is always used as a tool to support patriarchal violence and abuse. In fact, the Bible itself is the product of a patriarchal culture and expressed in androcentric language. Phillis Tribble’s statement is pertinent that, “... the Bible was born and bred in a land of patriarchy and abounded in male imagery and language.” Consequently, the interpretation is also biased. It ignores the experiences of women, sustains women’s powerlessness, and insists on the silence of women even in the circumstances of terror, extreme violence, abuse, discrimination, and marginalization. It socialises women to be silent, to adjust and accept the secondary position which will turn into violence and harassment within normal family relations or even in larger work and social contexts. Unknowingly, women allow themselves to be trapped within their own bodies, never realising it as denial of their subjectivity, self-respect, and self-determination.³⁰ Katak’s expression is pertinent here that female body is in a state of exile, including self-exile and self-censorship, outsidership, and un-belonging to itself within indigenous patriarchy.³¹

29 Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story; Women in Christian Tradition*, 43.

30 Gabriel Dietrich, *Women’s Movement in India: Conceptual and Religious Reflections*, (Bangalore: Breakthrough Publications, 1988), 93.

31 Ketu H. Katak, *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*. (London: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 291.

Female Body as a Site of Agency

Feminist concerns assess the female body as a site of agency and transformation within and despite of the patriarchal sociocultural context. It is the task of the woman to resist the patriarchal construction of female body and to redefine her body by the standards of self-assertion and dignity. Feminists emphasize the importance of critical awareness of self as a form of resistance to patriarchal power. Theoretically, this approach has drawn from Foucault. Critical awareness not only enacted resistance but also restructuring the self. Similarly, Hesse-Biber draws from the idea of critical awareness in suggesting a “re-visioning of femininity” as ways towards a more positive body image.³²

Therefore, women must be courageous to reclaim their right as living human beings. Mitti Amritham appeals women to develop the courage to deconstruct the ideologies of virginity, chastity, motherhood, and widowhood, which deny their natural bodily appetite and identity which form the inherent part of their organic entity. She continues prodding them to refuse to be mere vessels that carry children, and reclaim their womb and relocate the barren bodies.³³ They should encounter the patriarchal ascription of sacredness to the rituals which construct the natural bodily process as impure, disorder, and abnormal. It is possible when they exercise their “power from within” which is the “agency.” Sarah Lucia Hoagland also makes a similar observation. She understands power-from-within as the power of ability of engagement. It is creative, and hence it is an affecting and transforming power but not controlling power. This is the power that women should exercise to reclaim their bodies.³⁴

Pastoral Response

Deplorably, the church has proved itself a failure and as an additional burden for the women by imposing the patriarchal interpretations of the Bible. It is a challenge to the church which clings to the androcentric culturally based misinterpretations of the scripture to expel the patriarchal religious law.

32 Satu Liimakka, “Re-Embodied: Young Women, the Body Quest and Agency in the Culture of Appearances”(academic dissertation, Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Helsinki 2013).

33 Metti Amritham, *Women in India Negotiating Body Reclaiming Agency*, 118.

34 Seemanthini Niranjana, *Gender and Space Femininity, Sexualization and the Female Body* (Virginia: Sage Publications, 2001), 34.



Suggestions for Implementation

1. **Rereading the scripture:** The scripture has to be reread based on the concept of “liberation” considering the neglected voices and experiences of women.
2. **Reinterpretation of the scripture:** The reinterpretations should not be limited by a fixed written text. Scripture has to be interpreted in terms of the present socio, cultural, and political struggles.
3. **Re-telling the stories:** It is one of the strategies that gives voice to women and to re-create their dialogues. Understanding the boundaries of the text can be told many times in different ways depending on the situation. Woman can be the narrator of the text and the stories reclaim women as subjects with their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
4. **Inclusive language:** Androcentric language, and images, including metaphors of a masculine God, can be reshaped and replaced by inclusive language and images. The liturgies of androcentric language has to be changed into that of inclusive language.
5. **Indigenous traditions:** Adapting the feminine image of the Divine from indigenous traditions will help to overcome the one-sided and androcentric portrayal of the divine.
6. **Unbiased sermons:** The sermons should be preached with a stress on equality, peace, and liberation.
7. **Formation of holistic theology:** A new holistic theology has to be formed that deconstructs the myths that humiliate and marginalize the female body on the basis of patriarchal values.
8. **Participation of women:** A greater opportunity for women’s leadership and participation at all levels and in decision making of the structure and life of the church should be provided.

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An Impact of Globalization on Productive Role Due to Lack of Skill — Orientation to Dalit Women in India

Rajakumari Talapati

Introduction

At present, globalization is a trendy word in developed and developing countries. The basic assumption of this situation is bringing people, policies, and programs under one umbrella. At this juncture directly and indirectly, developed countries are in the lead, as policy makers and ruling the third world countries. Due to this effect, in a wider context, developing countries are driving towards the clutches of poverty. The impact of poverty portrays high in the lives of Dalit women of India. Even though the impact of globalization is not a new subject, still this paper is an attempt to review the impact and strategies to overcome the situation for better lives of Dalit women through the conscientization of various sources of learning and implementation.

Globalization

The common understanding of people on globalization is the availability of goods in any place in the world, e.g., soft drinks like Thums-up, CocaCola, and mineral water are available even in remote villages. In fact, people are not in a position to prefer locally available Sharbaths. Ian Goldin and Kenneth Reinert broadly stated that “Globalization is an increase in the impact on human activities like economic, political, social, cultural, technological, and biological forces that extend the boundaries of the countries.¹ Globalization is being used in all spheres of social lives. Mostly economic, social, and cultural activities connect with each other. Global villages, shopping malls in third world countries embrace the imagery with lots of hope that countries would board on a new direction.”² In reality, poverty increases in third world countries due to various dimensions, and for every situational challenge there is a solution. In this particular challenge, there are strategies planned in the form of solution to reduce the intensity of globalization, in order to reduce the poverty.

1 Ian Goldin and Kenneth Reinert, *Globalization for Development: Meeting New Challenges* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

2 John Mohan Raju J., “Globalization and the Role of Organic Intellectuals: Lessons from South India,” *Expository Times* 114 (July 2003), 336.



The Adverse Effects of Globalization Particularly to Third World Countries

Third World countries or developing countries symbolize a unique character of poverty. Over one billion people in the world today live under unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in developing countries.³ It affects their social, economic, and political conditions namely on land, technology, debts, migration, and so on. Poverty can be measured with basic amenities like food, clothing, housing, and also can be measured with density of land. Leonardo Boff states that “13 percentage of the world population lives in the rich countries, and 87 percentage in the wider south countries with their basic needs.”⁴ Hunger and malnutrition are the immediate manifestations of the poverty. According to the report of the U.N. Commission, 30 million newborn children each year suffer retarded growth due to malnutrition of mothers.⁵ The gap between the rich and poor countries is widening because of the variations in economic, social, political, and cultural conditions. Tissa Bala Surya opines that “the poor countries are poor, not because the lack of natural resources, but the sources are being taken over by others at a very low prices.”⁶ Regarding the intensity of poverty, over 1 billion people in the world are living under unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in developing countries.⁷

The Effect of Globalization on Agricultural and Industrial Sector

In India, 80 percent of the geographical area is occupied by villages and 20 percent by towns and cities. Agriculture is the main occupation in rural areas. The demographic picture of any village silently speaks the strong clutches of the caste system in India, like the main village and outskirts of the village. In the main village, high castes and backward castes have their housing, whereas in the outskirts Dalits have their colonies. Dalit castes surprisingly have separate households for Malas and Madigas in Andhra Pradesh. By observing this strong caste system, which is internalized in the minds of the people, Kathi Padma Rao stated that “in India caste has become not only an

3 K.C. Abraham, “Globalization and Liberative Solidarity,” *Globalization and Its Impact on Human Rights*, ed. Mathew George Chunakara (HongKong: Clear Cut Publishing & Printing Co, 1998), 18.

4 Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 105.

5 Mohan Raju, “Globalization and the Role of Organic Intellectuals,” 338.

6 Tissa Bala Surya, *Globalization and Human Solidarity* (Tiruvalla: Christhava Sahithya Samithi, 2000), 63.

7 Abraham, “Globalization and Liberative Solidarity,” 18.

integral part of national life, but also a mental strain which have the stamp of caste.”⁸ The main occupation of Dalits in an agricultural sector is daily labour. Dalit women as agricultural labourers are involved in planting, threshing, and weeding. Due to industrialization in a global world, 50 to 80 percent of women’s employment is replaced by planting, threshing, and weeding machines operated by men.⁹ Replacement of employment by machines and men result by the skill orientation. We can observe this condition in an orientation based on sex in families and society. Women, especially Dalit women, lead their lives with submission, obedience, silence, and ignorance. They have to play the role of listeners in the families, religious institutions (churches, temples), and society. The teachings of men always exercise their dominance and control in a vicious circle of patriarchy. At this juncture, many traditional structures have been patriarchal; feminists face the additional burden and criticisms of helping to help dismantle family, caste, and community, wherever they deny women the space to live.¹⁰ In the Indian context, the plight of Dalit women is grounded in socio, political, cultural aspects of life in family and society, and still there is a dream for healing. Unemployment and underemployment of women is considered with skill trainings. The inadequacy of skill trainings result in lower individual earnings, educational achievements underlining the cause of poverty and dependency.¹¹ The adverse consequences of globalization are evidenced in trading illicit drugs, weapons, spread of AIDS, and increase in crimes.¹²

Another pathetic situation in India, as Gabriele pointed out, is that “the influence and interference of marketization and General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB) facilitated the replacement of basic food crops like paddy into cash crops, and after introducing rubber chappals [slippers] in the market most of the cobbler women in Madhurai entered into prostitution for livelihood.”¹³ Sahoo opines that “the agricultural civilization was village based, and industrial civilization was urban

8 Kathi Padma Rao, “Caste, Dalit Woman,” *Feminist Theology Perspectives and Praxis*, ed. Prasanna Kumari (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran College & Research Institute, 1999), 61.

9 David Crystal, “Women and Work in the Unorganized Sector,” *Gender in Contemporary India*, ed. Prasanna Kumari (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 1998), 144.

10 Gabriele Dietrich, “Towards a Feminist Critique of Development and the New Economic Policy,” *Women Re-Shaping Theology Introducing Women’s Studies in Theological Education in India*, compiled by Lalrinawmi Ralte (Delhi: UTC& ISPC, 1998), 61.

11 Gordan Berlin and Andrew Sum, “Toward A More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future,” (New York: Ford Foundation, 1988), 2.

12 Mohan Raju, “Globalization and the Role of the Organic Intellectuals,” 334-339.

13 Gabriele Dietrich, “Towards a Feminist Critique of Development and the New Economic Policy,” 58.



based. Industrial civilization was running after material prosperity, and now in a danger of sustainability.¹⁴ In any industry, company, or factory, preference will be given to men, and is noted “that an intensive technology and mechanization prefer men to operate machinery.”¹⁵ The influence of marketization and liberalization resulted in the negative impacts on landlessness, lack of employment opportunities, low wages, migration, and encroachments. In this regard, the status of women is worst affected. Because of these negative effects, apart from losing their employment, young rural girls who go to urban areas for daily wage work face sexual harassment.¹⁶ The effect of globalization is high on women’s lives. Food crops are replaced by cash crops, community concept has been replaced by individualism, cottage industries have been replaced with big industries, the so-called infrastructure development of roads, airports, dams, and power plants, have replaced natural resources of forests, agricultural lands, and indigenous knowledge, and, ultimately, patriarchy has been established.¹⁷ The negative impact on women workers is high in number. It is recorded that in the Indian Tobacco Company in Chirala, 5,000 women who did manual stripping of leaves lost their jobs in 1982, replaced by mechanized threshing. Twenty-five-thousand women lost employment in course of automation.¹⁸

Globalization Effect on Ecological Concern

Woman’s life is closely connected with nature, particularly in rural and tribal areas. The day starts with collecting water and fuel for household work. A woman works for nearly 16 hours in a day by playing both unpaid and paid roles. In this regard “if women’s unpaid house work were counted as productive output in national income accounts, global output would increase by 20 to 30 percent.”¹⁹ Due to globalization, natural resources like land are damaged by losing its organic strength. At this juncture, as Gabriele points out, “the food crops like paddy fields have been converted for prawn cultivations, which leads to loss of workplace especially for women; one of the worst adverse effects of globalization is the beautification of cities by taking over hundreds

14 Basubed Sahoo, *Globalization, Liberation and Economic Development* (New Delhi: New Century Publications, 2013)

15 Crystal, “Women and Work in the Unorganized Sector,” 143.

16 Vincent, “The Impact of Globalization on Agricultural Labourers,” *Globalization Marginalization Of Dalits, Women & Tribals*, ed. Rosemary Viswanath (Bangalore: Solidarity, 1998), 38.

17 Jyothy Raju, “The Impact of Globalization on Women,” *Globalization Marginalization Of Dalits, Women & Tribals*, 49.

18 Rohini Hensman, “Impact of Technological Change on Industrial Women Workers” *Gender and Politics in India*, ed. Niveditha Menon (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 183.

19 Crystal, “Women and Work in the Unorganized Sector,” 137.

of acres from poor, and ultimately women are victims and silent bearers of inhumanness."²⁰ The parallel resemblance can be noticed between women and nature. As Elenora Rae described "the togetherness of nature and women, and link between the domination of women and domination of nature is known as ecofeminism."²¹ In a patriarchal setup, the controlling powers deprive both women and nature. Indeed the situation is portrayed that "the patriarchal science and technology control women by depriving their skills, women's knowledge on water conservation, seeds, herbal medicine."²² HIV/AIDS is a grave health issue in Indian society. As Tissa Balasurya has rightly pointed out "AIDS is another factor in global injustice. The rich countries are unwilling to make medicines to the poor countries at affordable prices."²³

Way forward with Strategies for Better Living

People from third world countries are victimized due to adverse globalization effect. The other side of the coin is with positive impact to overcome the poverty situation, with policies and programs more accessible to the grassroot level. At this juncture, Roland Robert says that "the globalization as a concept refers both to the comprehension of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole."²⁴ In this connection, Ian Goldin and Kenneth Reinert also stated that "the policies to be designed and accessed for the benefit of the marginalized like insurance to the climate change related risks, combating anti-microbial resistance, re-envisioning agricultural development for food security, and enhancing human security."²⁵ Even Basudeb Sahoo shared his views on the humanitarian point of view. He shared some of the measures like "creating possible employment oppurtunities, giving priority for infrastructure, qualitative education with subsidized prices, and free education for children, well thought of industrial development with ecological concerns, passion with equality and provision of employment and earning oppurtunities specially for women."²⁶

Indian mainline churches are very good platforms to share the concern of the adverse effects of globalization in connection with text. The already-existing fellowships of women and youth in every congregation is a great source of

20 Dietrich, "Towards a Feminist Critique of Development and the New Economic Policy," 59.

21 Eleanor Rae, *Women the Earth, the Divine*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 23.

22 Gabriele Dietrich, "Women Ecology and Culture," *Gender and Politics in India*, ed. Nivedita Menon (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 94.

23 Tissa Bala Surya, *Globalization and Human Solidarity*, 23.

24 Roland Robertson, *Globalization* (London: SAGE, 1992), 8.

25 Goldin and Reinert, *Globalization for Development*, 279.

26 Sahoo, *Globalization, Liberalization, and Economic Development*, 199.



conscientization in society. There is a dire need in the church to speak on behalf of the voiceless in a vigorous way with passion, commitment, focused vision, and well-planned objectives, and activities of mission towards the people who are standing on the edges without hope near fainting. Justice is the virtue in which everyone's human dignity is recognized and respected based on justice to one's neighbor. We need courage to decide in favor of justice for the oppressed.²⁷ The holistic mission to be strengthened is a new changing scenario to account for challenges of people in a wider context.

Conclusion

The effect of globalization on the marginalized reflects a negative impact. The innocent people with their ignorance have been victimized; particularly women are victimized three-fold based on caste, class, and gender. "The bodies of women of colour are being bruised with sexual exploitation at various levels."²⁸ It is very much applicable and true in the context of Dalit women. Dalit women are treated as untouchables, ugly, dark, and dirty women of low caste and low economic status in the day time, however, they are touchable in the night time. Sexual exploitation is a familiar experience in Dalit women's lives. It is a part of their lives and they bear it with silence due to lack of guarantee and protection in their unskilled work. This is a common phenomenon in rural and urban areas. It is painful to share, even in the villages of Andhra Pradesh, Dalit women are being brutally abused within their caste. They are silent and adjust to the dominant society with unemployment and underemployment without security for their bodies. Their bodies are being exploited in and out of the families with forced sex, childbearing, child-rearing, malnutrition, sexually transmitted diseases, battery by drunkard husbands, and as unpaid labour.

At present the government, NGOs, and the church are working for their dignity and empowerment. In the process of empowerment, the movement of self-help groups is a successful model facilitating women to overcome the global adverse effects in various aspects. Dalit women are bold enough to face the challenges, by coming together with their voices and strength. A successful case study is enclosed, to study the model of self-help groups. Self-help group is a movement in Andhra Pradesh, India, designed for empowerment of women below the poverty line. In this context, church has to travel beyond the borders, by breaking the confined circles of patriarchial system with male-oriented liturgy, prayers, and preaching. A paradigm shift should take place from

27 Tissa Bala Surya, *Planetary Theology* (New York: SCM Press Ltd, 1984), 254-264.

28 Andrea's lecture on Womanist theology on 20-7-2016, UTC, Bangalore.

institutionalised church to community church, from silent, comfort zones to disturbed, suffering zones. This paper will be concluded with John Milton's challenge, "When thousands of our people suffer and face discrimination from all sides, how can we call imitators of Christ and members of his kingdom?"²⁹

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²⁹ M.C. John Milton, "Rural Lands or Rural Mass," *Rally* 74 (1998), 18.



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Gender Justice in the Mara Community

A Reflection on Gender Justice among the Community of Mara People in Chin State, Myanmar

Rose Mary

The Maras were formally known as the Lakhers by the surrounding tribes. Their true name and the name which they call themselves is Mara. The whole region inhabited by them is known as "Mara rah" in their local language, meaning "the land of the Maras." In the early British period, this region was popularly known as the Lakher land.

The General Status of Mara Women in Society

The primary duty of a woman is confined to the home; the public domain is for man. Women cannot take part in the political affairs of the village. The identity of woman's clan and lineage remain even after her marriage. The youngest son is a person to inherit ancestral property and look after his parents till their last breath. The woman remains in an inferior position so far as her right to property and inheritance are concerned.

As the Mara tribe follows patriarchal system, there are many restrictions and circulations for women: Women should be quiet; women should not speak with loud voice; women do not have right to defend themselves against men whether right or wrong; women should stay at home and take care of the household. A woman should not be very brave; women should be girly. Women should always be after men only, women should not fart and so on.

The Mara people consider having many children as God's blessing. Most of the Mara people have more than six children in a family. Most of them are farmers because of poverty; daughters are getting less opportunity in education. The daughters are considered only for others. Hence, they are advised that there is no need for education: "You are for others. After getting married you will be for your husband's family."

Women are excluded in any decision-making because of which problems arise after marriage sometimes, even to the extent of divorce and all, and in which case women do not have any voice but to return to their parents, which is again considered shameful for women in the society. In case of marriage, women usually do not have the right to choose the man of their choice.



The voices of women are always unheard. Theologically trained women or women church ministers are not appreciated. Currently, among the 52 pastors in Mara Evangelical Church, there are only two ordained women pastors and among six theological students, only one female. The inferiority of women is deeply rooted in their long years of being in submissive roles. Further, many women are ignorant about their rights. A woman's role is limited to procreation, upbringing of children, and catering to the needs of the creature comforts of the men. There may be exception here and there, but this hardly affects the ethos of the nation as a whole. Most of Mara parents strongly object to the education of their daughters. They believe that if they send girls to school, it would lead to their becoming lazy and living an immoral life. Also, the question arises: If the girls were sent to school, who would work for the family?

Factors Limiting the Status of Women

There are many people who interpret the Bible from the perspective of its origin of patriarchal writing, which leads to women being excluded when it comes to leadership roles, even though women play very important roles especially in the church ministry. They think women should not be involved in leadership especially in church ministry. Women should remain silent. Why? Because they believe that the nature of women is impure.

The Bible should be used as a tool to transform and liberate the people, not as a tool to suppress or oppress any section of the humanity. Misreading and misinterpreting the Bible in turn acts as a suppressive source of degrading women's dignity and status in the church and society. The general attitude towards womanhood as inferior to manhood has not been changed in the minds of both men and women, as many societies have patriarchal cultures.

Thus, today there is the need to read the Bible with suspicion, with the eyes of tribal women's perspective, in order to recover fully the hidden roles and status of women, which will thereby bring changes in the society. Women's experiences must be taken seriously as a critical and primary source for theological education. The integration of the perspectives of women in theological education will create awareness of discriminatory gender realities and eventually help the people to change their attitude towards women. There is a need to search for inclusive imagery, language, and models which can liberate women from bondage. Even though the role of women in the church has been limited by male control of its administrative structure, which limits women's role to that of child bearing and rearing, and other responsibilities in the housekeeping area.

In spite of such restrictions on pastoral ministry, women play very active roles in fundraising for the many projects the church takes up, and women contribute by attending worship services regularly and participating in singing, giving, fasting, and praying, being obedient, and cooperating in all programmes of the church.

The Reason Gender Justice Is Required

Gender justice is a human right; every woman and girl is entitled to live in dignity and in freedom, without any fear. Gender justice is indispensable for development and poverty reduction, and is crucial to achieving human progress. Gender equality outcomes in aid effectiveness are less prioritized overall.

Women are unique persons, created in the image of God, professing the same faith; therefore, women must be a part of life in the society. Women deserve a central place with men in religious institutions and can no longer accept marginality and limited placement. Koti Anna says “there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.” The Mara women are filled with inferiority; all the children are closer to their mothers because women’s position in the family is to manage the household, including taking care of the children. Automatically the children grow up with the behaviour and attitude of inferiority that they learn from the mother. Therefore, from the context of the Mara’s society, until and unless we educate the women there will be no development.

The role of women in childrearing is very important. From the gender context of the Mara society, woman is the one who plants the flower to make a house beautiful, a woman is the one who keeps the house clean, a woman is the one who decorates the house, and a woman is the one who is able to maintain the closest relationship with the children or siblings. Therefore, women play very important role for overall betterment of the society. Without women, there is no harmony; women are the ones who bring harmony which makes the world beautiful. The ministry of the church and development process for the community is not complete without the participation of women. Empowering women is empowering men as well. Empowering women is empowering the development of the world. Empowering women is building peace for the society. Empowering women is watering nature to be green. The greenness brings a healthy environment for long life of the human beings. Women have the nature to make the environment beautiful. Women’s nature is peace, love, kindness. Women should be given equal opportunity in serving God, as they are also called by God. One of the best ways to ensure that we live in a safe, healthy, and sustainable world is to support women



who want reproductive healthcare and effective contraception.

Paradigm Shift of Patriarchal Culture

Feminism and feminist theology have been an unending debate since its inception in the mid nineteenth century. Particularly in theological discussions, this issue has been one of the most talked about by people from different backgrounds with different ideologies. The traditional mindset of the people holds the view that women are subordinate to men and hence, they were silenced and their stories are almost absent in the historical writings. Various theologies that have been formulated are based on male dominated ideologies and perspectives influenced by sociopolitical, religious, and cultural settings.

A critique of traditional biblical hermeneutics was brought forward by E.S. Fiorenza; she uses the Bible in service of liberation. Feminists have uncovered a lot of evidence of the inferiority, subordination, and abuse of women in the Bible. They discern the critique of patriarchy and concentrate upon discovering and rediscovering the traditions that challenge the culture. Feminists' interpretation challenges the distorted interpretation of the Bible and brings the text meaning that is liberative for women as well as for the other oppressed groups.

Chained by the patriarchal culture for a very long period of time, dominance over women by men happens consciously or unconsciously even in our society today. Dominant theologies cannot be done away with the blink of an eye. It requires both time and participation of every responsible thinking human being in creating a society that is free from ignoring, discriminating, silencing, and subjugating. Feminism, as we understand in its true sense, is not to claim the powers or position of men, but acceptance of differences, seeing every individual as unique where both men and women can complement each other. In fact, it is our differences that make the world a beautiful place because life without variety would be monotonous. This concept of an egalitarian community should also be fostered in our local churches as we go and minister to our people. Women should also be encouraged and equipped in decision making either in church, politics or society where they recognize their importance and value as a complete human being created in the image of God.

Radical feminism may lead some men to become misogynists and a poor understanding or lack of proper knowledge about feminist theology can lead us to wrong interpretation. In turn, it will give a misconception in our theological discourse about this very topic. Women who voice their opinions

publicly and act independently are often considered feminists who do not respect men. However, sensitivity should be developed that preventing women from exercising freedom of thought and speech is also disrespect to women. This itself is a dominating culture and hence detrimental to the progress and harmony of our society. Therefore, a deeper study of feminist theology and understanding of women's experiences and a careful critique and reconstruction of dominant theologies is the need of the hour.

A brief biblical reflection

Jesus, in his ministry, was very positive towards women. He gave attention to women, children, men, poor, rich, and aliens. Jesus' proclamation about the impending coming of the reign of God is all about "new covenant," "new community," and "new life." Church and society should live up to their responsibility to care for the stranger, the poor, the weak, and women.

Insofar as Jesus' personality is imagined, he is always generous, friendly, helpful, kind, and loving. He appears as a human being who successfully combines masculine and feminine qualities. Jesus treated women not as females but as human beings. He had a revolutionary attitude towards women compared to that of his Jewish contemporaries. There are numerous examples recorded in the gospels, to cite a few: Jesus allegedly broke the purity laws (Mark 5:25-34), spoke to women (Samaritan women John 4:1-42; crippled woman Luke 13:10-17), and admitted women as his disciples (Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, etc.), which were against the existing Jewish norms. There are number of stories recorded in the four gospels of Jesus' earthly ministry where Jesus encountered the contextual realities of the people during that time. His message was a message of liberation and transformation irrespective of gender, sex, race, and colour.

God gifts women in the same way as he gifts men. God intended the male-female relationship to be one of partnership. Both men and women are called in this ministry to serve God and one another. Therefore, ministry belongs to the whole people of God. This implies that the ministry of the church remains incomplete without the full and equal participation of women. As we move forward for God's glory, we need to labour faithfully at providing men and women every possible avenue to function as partners and coworkers God created us to be.



Wishes and Concluding Words

Brothers, uncles, fathers, teachers, please help your mothers, sisters, aunties, and coworkers. Stand up for the right by sharing the equal right and opportunities for the ultimate benefit for humanity itself and the beautiful world itself. Know that when you empower your fellow women you are empowering yourself, and the good reason for all because women are the best supporters for all things.

Fellow women, please be free from inferiority and unconfident nature This is the time to wake up from the darkness and make our society bright, make our society beautiful. Believe in yourself that you are capable to serve society for the glory of God. You have the ability to make the change. Know yourself: You are the key to make our society develop.

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“Renew and Transform” Reformed Theology

Lilly Phiri

Introduction

“The Church [is] Reformed, Always Reforming” (*Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda*) is not only a motto, but part of our identity, which appealed us to hold up the faithfulness to the Gospel of full life through the constant renovation of the church, through a continual reading of the signs of the times. - (WCRC Executive Committee Minutes, 2015)

As the worldwide church prepares to commemorate five hundred years of the Protestant Reformation, it is our responsibility as individual Christians, churches, and institutions belonging to the Reformed tradition not only to conduct introspection on our theological journey thus far, but to anticipate and dare envision new theological trajectories that will keep the Reformation fires alive. It is a time that challenges us to remain theologically relevant and formulate new theological directions as part of the “renew and transform” process. In taking stock of how far we have come and where we hope to venture theologically, we need to be brave enough to embrace a “renew and transform” approach in our theological engagements. On the one hand, it is prudent that this moment encourages us to hold onto the fundamentals and non-negotiables inherent within Reformed theology so as to maintain our identity. On the other hand, it is a time to undertake the task of embracing a “renew and transform” paradigm of doing theology that pushes us beyond our comfort zones in a quest for revived “faith seeking understanding.” “Renew” means to recreate, repair, restore, or rejuvenate, which basically entails giving back life to something, while “transform” denotes a metamorphosis in form, nature, and character. Therefore, “renew and transform” are simultaneous engagements as, with God’s help, we give back life to Reformed theology while at the same time changing the complexion of our theology.

A Synopsis of the Roots of Reformed Theology

The basic understanding of theology is that it is the study about God and religious ideas. It is more difficult to define Reformed theology than it is to describe, hence Jan Rohls asserts it “dissolves into a plurality of highly different theological positions all belonging to the same family” (2003:35). It is theology marked by theological and confessional differences, and at the same time



emphasizes ecumenism among churches that fall under the Reformed tradition. Reformed theology was born out of the efforts of Reformers such as John Calvin, Johannes Hus, and Huldrych Zwingli, among others. Its emergence can mainly be traced among the Dutch, English, French, German, Scottish, and Swiss theologians. The Reformers theologically challenged the Roman Catholic Church on an elitist Bible that was only written and could only be read in Latin, the concept of purgatory, and the selling of indulgences. Over time, Reformed theology has grappled with other theological concerns of its time. Below, I walk you through some of the realities that theologically challenge Reformed theology today.

Doing Reformed Theology Today

Every theology worth its salt should respond to the challenges of its time. Today's Reformed theology is faced with a number of contentious realities that continue to beg for its theological attention and theologically inspired action. Although not exhaustive, the following are some of the challenges facing Reformed theology: ecological and climate change, economies that enslave humanity, poverty, political systems that promote self-service, unemployment, militarization, sex and sexualities, gender equality, human trafficking, discrimination, racism, etc. Some of these challenges are within and outside the Reformed family; hence, theological responses have been and ought to be both inward and outward looking. Within itself, Reformed theology is also faced with challenges of continuous self-redefinition whilst maintaining a Reformed identity, undertaking mission amidst growing levels of global Pentecostalism, ecumenicity beyond the frontiers of Christianity, sex and sexualities, as well as gender equality.

The globe continues to experience climate change and ecological imbalances that adversely affect human and non-human lives. Thus, ecological theological discourses cannot be wished away. Through the Accra Confession of 2004 and other theological discourses, Reformed theology has responded to the challenges of climate change, calling for responsible relations among the created order. Notwithstanding the efforts of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, we still experience and read reports of deforestation, harmful farming practices, and pollution of water bodies, air, and the land, etc., which jeopardize the future of the globe. The "think global, act local" mantra has not been implemented to allow for the translatability of the Accra Confession among individual local churches; many remain ignorant about the existence of the Accra Confession. Reformed theology needs to "renew and transform" its theological

strategies and methods of addressing climate change through a hands-on approach by deliberately emphasizing human responsibility towards the created order at the individual church level.

Furthermore, matters of climate change are closely linked to the economy, politics, poverty, and unemployment. Current capitalism encourages wealth creation over the wellbeing of humanity and the created order, e.g. the infamous sweatshops in which children and adults work in inhuman conditions. Capitalism also promotes militarization in the protection of territories and acquisition of natural resources. Economies are usually aided by political policies and systems that only benefit a few people at the expense of the many. Resources from struggling economies are extracted to feed the lifestyles of beneficiaries of capitalism whilst leaving those who rightfully own the resources more impoverished. Additionally, poor economies are subjected to a new form of colonialism; economic colonization, through transnational corporations that operate in their countries, uses cheap labour and significantly contributes to resource depletion. In this worrisome context of survival of the fittest, such injustices pose theological challenges to Reformed theology at global, national, and local church levels on the need to be prophetic by addressing these systemic injustices. At such a time, can Reformed theology, local churches, and individual Christians afford not to speak truth to power?

Gender inequality, caste, and racism are some among the many forms of discrimination prominent in contemporary society. In 2012, I had an interesting conversation with a friend who lectures in a seminary and is entrusted by her church to groom theological students through ministerial training, but she is considered to be of a “wrong” gender for ordination. This situation is not unique, as many females within and outside the Church continue to face discrimination of all kinds based on their gender. In some cases, recognition of females comes in the semblance of tokenism and not merit. Reformed theology has tried to address gender inequality at a global level but the onus remains with individual churches and Christians within the Reformed tradition to make gender justice a practical reality. After all, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). The journey to “renew and transform” Reformed theology demands the restoration of human dignity of persons regardless of gender. Any form of injustice should make us uncomfortable enough to act against it. What theologies and hermeneutics in our churches hinder gender equality and how best can we revisit, “renew and transform” them to foster human flourishing?



I have decided to dedicate more space discussing sex, sexuality, and the human body simply because it is time that Reformed theology talked about sex not by default but by design. In spite of sex and sexuality being integral components of our being as they embody our humanness, they remain contentious and touchy subjects. In the process of writing this paper, I was reminded of the importance of the subject of sex, sexuality, and the human body after a vibrant young man I have interacted with on a few occasions attempted suicide because his sexual orientation and gender identity were assumed to be against the religio-cultural grain. Matters of sex, sexuality, and the human body hinge on life and death, but no life needs to be lost on account of sexuality. The human body, regardless of its form, shape, orientation, or identity needs to be celebrated simply because it is created by God and is not synonymous with sin. Calvin, the Reformation frontrunner, basing his argument on the creation and fall of humankind and Paul's writings,¹ asserts that original sin is a result of disobedience to God's word through the futile human attempt to be like God. Therefore, "when the word of God is despised, all reverence for Him [sic] is gone. His [sic] majesty cannot be duly honoured among us, nor His [sic] worship maintained in its integrity, unless we hang as it were upon His [sic] lips" (Calvin 2002:154). What constitutes sin therefore is disobedience to God's word and humankind wanting to assume the place of God, instead of letting God be supreme and worshiping God. Calvin aligns his argument in relation to the goodness of creation, unlike the Augustinian tradition, which regards sexuality as sin, hence, placing emphasis on the ethics of disciplining the human body. For Calvin, the story of the fall does not denounce desire but the human attempt to be like God. Building on this understanding on the fall of humankind, it can be offered that human sexuality and the human body are not sinful objects for control and policing but subjects for celebration. The non-prescriptive approach towards sexuality and the human body enables a holistic embrace of our humanness unlike locking human sexuality to procreation only, thereby subscribing to heteronormativity. Can today's Reformed theology envision what it would mean to worship God together with our different bodies and sexualities?

Issues of sex and sexualities have been a source of divisions in the Church, with some expressions maintaining heteronormativity while others are more embracing of all sexualities. Both trajectories rely on the Bible as a source of authority for their positions. Among some of the texts used to denounce

¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*. (Owen. J. Trans & Ed.). (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1980).

non-normative sexualities are Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 19, which are understood from a dominant narrative perspective, hence rejecting other forms of sexualities in preference for heterosexuality. In our bid to “renew and transform,” would we acknowledge that the Bible has many voices? When the dominant narrative is not life affirming for all human beings, would we seek alternative narratives? Imagine what alternative narratives of the Genesis 1:27 without a focus on sexual complementarity would look like. What would alternative narratives of Genesis 19 look like? What would the counter narratives of sin be?

The Reformation agenda was partly pioneered out of the quest for a “liberated Bible,” the question then is: How liberated is the Bible in the twenty-first century in relation to biblical hermeneutics around sex and sexualities? Let us dare to theologically discuss sex and sexualities with nonjudgmental attitudes. No matter how contentious sex and sexualities may be portrayed to be, they are part of the twenty-first century challenge and need to be addressed. As is typical of Reformed theology that promotes theological and confessional plurality, can we be transgressive enough to imagine possibilities of convergences of life-affirming sexualities at the expense of diversities of sexualities²? Encouraging convergences of sexualities will allow for the promotion of life-affirming sexualities and not focusing on what divides sexualities. A convergence of sexualities has the potential to influence our biblical hermeneutics leading to the embracing of all humans on account of their humanness and not sexual orientation. After all, “renew and transform” of Reformed theology prods us to operate outside our comfort zones and speak the “unspeakable.”

Renew and Transform: The Way forward for Reformed Theology

Arguably, Reformed theology has undergone a significant “renew and transform” process in its bid to respond to challenges of particular moments in history. Projections towards the future and reading the theological terrains of our time, the global Reformed family cannot escape the reality of the need to maintain a Reformed identity amidst the rise in the number of Christian expressions and religious beliefs. George Stroup notes that:

2 Lilly Phiri and Federico Settler, “From Sexual Diversities to Convergences of Sexualities: Possibilities within Southern African Protestantism,” *Diaconia*, vol. 6 (2015): 117-132.



when Christians from the Reformed tradition participate in ecumenical conversations with other Christians (and with representatives from other religious traditions), it is important they understand their own theological identity—that is, who they are as Reformed Christians and what it is they bring to ecumenical conversations (2003:257).

Inasmuch as Reformed identity undergoes transformation once it comes into contact with other Christian and religious identities, it is vital to maintain who we are as that is our uniqueness. Furthermore, whilst maintaining our identity, how then do we as Reformed Christians engage in ecumenicity beyond the frontiers of Christianity?

With the rise in global Pentecostal extremism, which promotes subjective materialism as a distorted form of spirituality, the challenge for Reformed theology is how to theologically engage such developments and also do mission. “Renew and transform” understanding demands that Reformed theology transcends theologies of prosperity, which encourage accumulation of material possessions as a sign of divine blessings at all costs at the expense of sound relations with God and the rest of the created order.

Furthermore, how best can we theologize gender, sex, and sexualities in life-affirming ways in the twenty-first century and beyond? How does our Reformed identity, which promotes unity in diversity at confessional and traditional levels, best translate into unity in diversity in matters of gender, sex, and sexualities?

Conclusion

Approaching five hundred years of the Reformation is a moment of reflection on where the Reformed family has come from theologically and where it sees itself going in the years to come. This paper is not a comprehensive guide, neither is it as straightjacket as I take cognizance of the contextual differences that determine the kind of theologies we engage in. However, my hope is that by reading this paper, it challenges you and me to think outside the box, to allow for a breath of fresh air in our theological endeavors.

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World Communion of Reformed Churches Executive Committee, 2015 Minutes.



Memories and Hopes

This reflection was jointly developed as a resource for the 16 Days of Action Against Gender Violence in November 2015

Josefina Hurtado and Dora Arce Valentín

We remember the spaces of friendship provided by women, coming together in such circles since ancient times to talk with one another. Their languages coded in many different ways, but united in an identity which bears the seal of their life experience.

Thanks to these friends, we have been able to be weak, or contradictory, or sad or unmotivated. We have been able simply to be, in any way at all. In the midst of the darkness, the network of their love has sustained us.

We carry with us the image of the traces of this thread, which moves in circles through time, binding us together with the strength of solidarity and complicity of women all over the world from the earliest times.

And in spite of everything, our ancestral memory reaches out to us and inspires us to continue to grow spiritually, to recognize in ourselves the image of the divine. To value and enjoy each her own gifts, her own knowledge. We hear the lament of so many women who have been denied the opportunity to see themselves as human beings who have great value simply because they exist.

Incredulity at what is happening. Sacred bodies mistreated. In the fields, in the jails. Unbearable pain. Inadequate tears. We pay homage to all the nameless women who experience violence just for being women.

And in spite of everything, our ancestral memory reaches out to us and inspires us to continue to create safe spaces where we can share our vulnerabilities and our strengths, where we can share our immense resilience, so that we can rise up and rebel against the violence that is rained down upon us just because we are women. We hear the cries of so many who endure violence in so many forms and have become mere statistics for this or that charitable organization.

Thousands of voices raised loudly to announce Good News, raised with our own voices to demand justice and defend life. Organized, in thousands of "circles." Discussing, challenging, conspiring. We are laughing with the wise laughter that does not let us sink into despair. We are taking back the word Commitment.

And in spite of everything, our ancestral memory reaches out to us and inspires us to seek ourselves in the memories of other women, in the strength of so many of them, in the tenderness of all of them. So that we can build the networks that we need, and know that together we can change everything. We hear the lament of so many women who have been denied the opportunity to seek these things, these networks that united us and strengthen us, because it is so very good to know that we are not walking this path alone.

Ignorance (lack of understanding) of our bodies, unwanted pregnancies, back-street abortions, single mothers. We are inspired by the presence of our mothers and grandmothers with their healing hands. Inspired to wish from the depths of our very being that our daughters and granddaughters will be able to decide to be mothers if they choose, and that there will be guarantees of that. That their bodies will be connected to the simple and beautiful things in life, that they will be able to sense the cycles within themselves and around them. That they will be able to produce and reproduce the sacred internal and external rhythms of life. That they will give thanks for every blessed minute of life in abundance.

And in spite of everything, our ancestral memory reaches out to us and inspires us to express the good and the just in every word of gratitude for life for life, in every sister near or far who reclaims her body as a gift and a [vessel] for the sacred. In every word or gesture by which we celebrate that we are part of the creation and that we seek to live in Harmony with the space in that creation which we have been given. We hear the lament of so many women who have been denied their right to a life with dignity, free of violence, free of fear, because they have not been able to become what we (all) want to be.

We are focused on ourselves and each other. We feel the life force beating within us, unique and powerful. Both as synthesis (of what has gone before) and (a new) project. We are the builders of our present. Women of all continents who all desire peace united with justice and equality, here and now.



A Declaration Of Faith On Women's Ordination

A Declaration of Faith: God, through the Holy Spirit, calls both women and men to participate fully in all the ministries of the church.

This declaration testifies to our belief that women and men were created equally in the image of God and that they therefore should be treated with equal respect and dignity. It testifies to the profound unity of all who have been baptized. It testifies to our experience over centuries that God has been calling both women and men to ministries of spiritual leadership and granting them the gifts and graces to carry out those roles. In some of the cultural contexts in which our churches live today, this declaration goes against the prevailing ethos. Thus faithful Christians are often called to be countercultural. Theological integrity and justice require that the churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in solidarity courageously declare their commitment to assure that both women and men have equal standing to reflect their common incorporation into the body of Christ in baptism and service.

The churches of the WCRC now pledge that our common practice will be to welcome into ordained ministry women who experience that call and who demonstrate the gifts necessary for leadership and service in church ministries. Their placement and any compensation will be determined on the same basis as for men.

The Context

Why do we make this declaration now?

Emerging from the women's pre-assembly at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, the issue about commitment to full partnership between women and men led to affirm the need to work toward making ordination of women binding for the Communion in addition to achieve 50% of representation of women on the executive committee.

The Uniting General Council also affirmed the ordination as central to the understanding of communion and state: "True unity cannot be realized in a context where the call of God to women to actualize their gifts in the ministry of Word and Sacrament is not recognized."¹

As part of the recommendations approved the WCRC committed to "...promote the ordination of women and work toward a time when the ordination of women

¹ Record of Proceedings, United General Council 2010, Grand Rapids, USA, p.160.

will be binding on communion.”²

To achieve these mandates, we believe we have to work toward a declaration of faith, and this document attempts to address this issue.

The brutality of the treatment of women across the world today reflects a long-standing view in some cultures that women are by nature inferior to men, born to serve and obey men, that the girl is less valuable than the boy, that women deserve neither respect nor dignity. We see that the girl and the mother are often the last in the family to be fed and are the least educated, so that their life possibilities are limited. We see mass rape of girls and women used as a weapon of war with appalling consequences. We see women forbidden to leave their homes and take part in the wider life of society. Even in highly developed nations, women are paid less for the same work than men, sometimes have restricted access to healthcare and are rarely fully represented in national governing structures.

Churches rightly protest assaults on the human rights of women, but their moral authority is compromised when they demonstrate by their institutional life that they, too, believe in the inferiority of women and their incapacity to serve as ordained church leaders. The churches’ refusal to ordain women is experienced by them as painful oppression, robbing them of their proper dignity. Even when the women have been ordained, they often face discrimination and marginalization.

The churches of the Reformed family today, spanning the globe and rooted in diverse cultures, have the opportunity and the obligation to witness before the world that women and men alike are created in the image of God, deserve equal respect and dignity, and can find in the institutional life of the church an affirmation of those beliefs. The ordination of women is a powerful witness to the equality of women and men in the eyes of God. It is also an expression of gratitude for women’s rich gifts of leadership that invigorate the life of the churches.

The Biblical Foundation: Creation and New Creation

The Bible, foundation of Reformed belief and practice, has been used to support both the approval and disapproval of women’s ordination. The Bible in fact both reflects and challenges the patriarchal world in which it was written, prompting us to define a hermeneutical lens through which to interpret the Bible. The Reformed Christians generally read the Bible in the light of the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, aided by critical biblical scholarship and rigorous reflection and discernment in the community of faith, upheld by prayer. This approach

² Idem.



discerning God's will avoids simply studying and citing isolated texts. God's grace for the whole of creation leads us to approach the Bible embracing mercy, justice and liberation in the face of the fallen world and structures of oppression. Galatians 5:1: "For freedom, Christ has set us free." There has been a fundamental shift in critical scholarship that has supported a renewed understanding of the equality proclaimed in the Gospel. This has guided us in our firm conviction that the ordination of women is a fully biblical imperative. We will sketch the basis of that belief, focusing on two texts: Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28.

Creation: Genesis 1:27-28: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'"(NRSV).

Fundamental to our understanding of the proper role of women is this verse, announcing at the very beginning of the biblical narrative that women and men together are created in God's image. This is a statement of equality and solidarity. Neither here nor in the following verse's charge to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth is there any suggestion of division of labor by sex or of women's subordination.

Opponents of women's ordination often point to Genesis 2:18: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (NRSV). The term "helper" has been seen as a sign of subordination. In the Hebrew, however, the word carries the opposite connotation. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures the same word often describes God creating and saving Israel, a source of strong support. The recognition by the man in Genesis 2:23 that the woman is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is again a declaration of mutuality and solidarity.

We reject theologies that teach that women are by their biological nature inferior to men, or that women reflect the image of God less fully than men, or that women's proper role is limited to procreation and the domestic realm, excluding them from taking public responsibility within creation.

God's intention at creation is equality and solidarity between women and men in harmony with all creation. After the fall both the woman and the man experience distortion of those relationships. In Genesis 3:16, the woman hears that she should be subject to her husband as punishment for sin, and the man is punished by the cursing of the land and his labor.

The biblical narrative continues then to portray a patriarchal society. Jewish women in the Hebrew Scriptures rarely appear in official leadership. We do read of Queen Esther and of Deborah the judge, and of prophets like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Nodiah. A rich succession of able women nonetheless pervades the biblical text, such as the clever Hebrew midwives in Egypt, and the beloved Ruth with her own book.

New Creation: Galatians 3:27-28: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (NRSV).

The ministry of Jesus portrays many challenges to the oppressive practices of society, where public contact between women and men was strictly regulated. For example, he intervened against stoning of the woman taken in adultery. He allowed the hemorrhaging woman to touch his garment, and he healed her. He was surrounded by both women and men as disciples and empowered them in life and ministry. He taught about the reign of God that was already beginning among them and that would upend the current way of life. His intimate friendships with Mary and Martha permitted them to engage in theological conversation. He accepted the Syro-Phoenician woman's challenge to his understanding of his mission, and yielded to her plea to heal her daughter. He crossed the conventional boundary by engaging in a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, talking with her at length, and enabling her to return to her community and minister by sharing the good news. His interaction with Mary Magdalene transformed her into a faithful disciple who witnessed the resurrection. After his resurrection, he appeared to women disciples and sent them to tell the others that he lived. These examples demonstrate the countercultural nature of Jesus's ministry and indicate the value and significance Jesus gave to women in ministry.

In the band of disciples that gathered in Jerusalem to pray after Jesus' resurrection were "certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14, NRSV). All were present at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Peter, addressing the people of Jerusalem to explain how the resurrected Jesus was the Messiah, took his text from the prophet Joel: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18, NRSV; cf. Joel 2:28-9). In this new era of the reign of God where the Spirit has been poured



out, women will have a far more egalitarian role than before. So it should not surprise us to read in the book of Acts about women prophets like the daughters of Philip, about Priscilla with her husband teaching the preacher Apollos and accompanying Paul on his journey, risking their necks for him, he says, and about the women hosting house churches. Paul speaks warmly and gratefully about his women colleagues in ministry: among them Junia the apostle; Phoebe, the minister (or deacon) of the church of Cenchreae; Priscilla and Mary. Some had been jailed with him (Romans 16:1-16). The widows who cared for the poor (I Timothy 5) were understood by John Calvin to be part of the office of deacon. There are many records in the early centuries of the ordained women deacons.

It is in the context of the new creation, where the Holy Spirit calls those least expected to give leadership, that we read Galatians 3:27-28 as part of an ancient baptismal rite. All who are called into faith and baptized into Christ's body have become one family where human barriers accepted by society must fall. We know from the book of Acts how difficult a struggle it was for those early Christians to accept that the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, previously sanctioned by religion, had been broken by the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet a clear decision was made that gentiles given the gift of faith must be accepted into the community without circumcision. Some of our churches were still struggling in the late nineteenth century with the implications of that phrase "no longer slave or free," but the teaching of the Bible eventually led them to decide that slavery was morally wrong and that Christians could not be slaveholders. It took another century for some of our churches to understand that the racial barrier has also been broken by the Holy Spirit, and there can be no racially segregated churches. Our Reformed family at the WARC General Council in Ottawa in 1982 declared that apartheid (which had extended to church structures) is sin, and justifying it morally and theologically is "a travesty of the Gospel, and in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy."

We now are at a moment in history when our churches must declare that among the baptized there is no longer male and female. This means that men can no longer be exclusively privileged with church leadership.

Experience in the Life of the Church

Women lost their equality with men in the Church in the early centuries as the house churches moved out into public spaces, and the Church became institutionalized. Theologians living in the dualistic thought of the Hellenistic

world lost the Hebraic belief in the goodness of creation. They adopted from Greek philosophy and Roman law unbiblical views of the subordination and inferiority of women. Thomas Aquinas, for example, adopted Aristotle's view of women as defective males, damaged in the process of gestation. Apart from some women deacons in the East who marched with the clergy in the early middle ages, the only official role available to medieval women in the church was that of a nun; but some nuns did exercise remarkable influence. Christine de Pisan, a lay woman, set off around 1400 a centuries-long literary debate about the nature of women in which she challenged the theologians' assumptions. Marie Dentiere in the early years of the Reformation in Geneva took up this debate, insisting that the liberating Gospel called on women to speak and write, and she did. She asked, "Are there two gospels, one for men, another for women?" Women writing in this tradition pointed out the varied roles of women in the New Testament, reading the Bible very differently than either Catholic or Protestant male theologians. Attempts were made to silence these women.

Luther's Reformation, honored in 2017 at its 500th anniversary, gave to all of Protestantism the concept of the priesthood of all believers, the right of all the baptized to stand before God to pray for one another and to teach one another divine things, declaring God's gracious love and forgiveness to one another. This priesthood is distinct, however, from public ministry on behalf of a congregation. Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians repudiated the Aristotelian view of women, gave greater dignity to marriage, and even encouraged women to join congregational singing in public worship. Nonetheless they did not understand the priesthood of all believers to undermine the tradition of exclusively male clergy carrying out public ministry. After five hundred years, it is time for us to declare that a full understanding of the priesthood of all believers calls for equality of women and men in public ministry as well.

The ordination of women already has a long-standing tradition in the Reformed family. The Congregationalists have been ordaining women ministers since 1853, when Antoinette Brown became the first woman Congregational minister. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church ordained Louisa Woosley in 1889, but no other Presbyterians followed for many years. There have been women deacons since at least the late 19th century, and women elders since at least the 1930's. Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, increasing numbers of Reformed churches around the world have been regularly ordaining women as ministers, elders and deacons, and today most do so. Therefore, we have abundant evidence that women in diverse cultures on every continent can become fine theologians and have fruitful ministries. Our churches have confirmed through



their experience with faithful women leaders that God is indeed calling women to ordained ministries and through them strengthening the churches.

Through history and in the present there is a disturbing recurrent experience in churches that do not ordain women. It is the disjunction of ordination from the practice of functions ordinarily related to ordained ministry. In all our churches women carry out tasks that churches with Presbyterian governance typically assign to elders and deacons; yet where ordination of women is refused, women carry out those tasks without the authority of office, without the ability to participate in the decision-making of governing bodies, and without the collegial support of ordained colleagues. In unusual situations of flux and transition, where pastors are scarce, where men are at war, on the mission field and in remote locations, able women are also called to exercise pastoral functions. They organize churches, lead public worship, preach, lead and teach in theological schools, and provide pastoral care. Yet even if they are theologically educated, they, too, lack the authority of office, participation in governing bodies, and collegial support, and they cannot offer the sacraments. They are also paid much less than pastors. The Reformed tradition has closely tied ordination to the functions of ministry. If women are trusted to carry out the functions of ministry, they should be ordained. This is a matter of faith and of justice.

When surveyed, most of our member churches that do not ordain women do not cite theology as the reason but culture. Some live in contexts where secular society does not accept women's leadership. Some are minorities in predominantly Roman Catholic or Orthodox countries and feel ecumenical pressure to refrain from actions their neighbors find offensive. These cultural pressures are significant and sometimes life threatening. The Church throughout its history has faced such challenge in its struggle to make a faithful witness in the world. The WCRC needs to accompany these churches in solidarity. In Christ we are called to be a new creation, transcending the oppressive aspects of culture.

Since the Seoul General Council of WARC in 1989, general councils have been calling on the churches to re-examine their practice if they do not ordain women and developing ways to assist them in this process. Those churches that do ordain women have been asked to study whether women ministers have equal access to placement opportunities and equal pay for equal work. The survey made by the office of partnership between women and men in 2009 (WARC) presented not very precise information since all churches did not

respond properly. It showed that at least 42 churches do not ordain women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Those churches are distributed as follow: Europe 7, Africa 18, Middle East 3, Latin America 5, Asia 9. From 2010 until now we have not been able to articulate a clear response from the member churches, through the regional councils that allow us to update these figures point out that those numbers are still valid.

We now seek to live out our commitment to communion and justice as we make this common Declaration of Faith, praying: Living God, renew and transform us!



Subscription prices:

1 year: 25 euro/30 USD

1 year solidarity subscription: 40 euro/50 USD

Single Issue: 15 euro/20 USD

*Reformed World is published three times a year.
All prices include the cost of surface mailing.*

***Back issues, books and other
publications are available from:***

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Financial contributions are welcome!

Cover, design and layout: Michael Kolk, Kolk Creative
Printed in Germany.

Published by the World Communion of Reformed Churches
42 Knochenhauerstrasse, 30159 Hannover, Germany

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