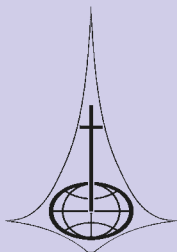




“It will not be so among you!” (Mk 10,43)

A FAITH REFLECTION ON GENDER AND POWER



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

“It will not be so among you!” (Mk 10,43)

A FAITH REFLECTION ON GENDER AND POWER

**The Lutheran World Federation
Department for Mission and Development
Women in Church and Society**

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FOREWORD

Equal participation and leadership by women and youth have long been on the agenda of the Lutheran World Federation. The commitments made in Budapest in 1984 and in Curitiba in 1990 have been reaffirmed by subsequent LWF assemblies and Council meetings.

The formulation of this working document “**It will not be so among you! A faith reflection on Gender and Power**” is part of a process of systematizing and building up a theological, gender vocabulary and an understanding about gender mainstreaming in LWF programs and member churches. It is a contribution to the process of contextualizing gender analysis and tools in different fields of knowledge, giving special attention to the dialogue between theory and practice in theological reflection.

Cultural settings, an interweaving of religious and faith-based perspectives, permeate perceptions, mould behavior and often represent exclusion for both men and women. Religious discourse is one of the most powerful and surreptitious forms through which cultural systems feed and maintain unequal gender relations. In such contexts, the use of power in relationships must be analyzed and understood as an integral part of the social system. Yet, faith and religious practices or institutions can also play a leading role in the discussion on gender equality by cooperating positively toward a redefinition of roles and structures, and ensuring inclusiveness and the participation of women as subjects of change.

Gender equality and justice are rooted in the biblical reflection of creation—female and male—in God’s image. Justice and dignity, overcoming (social, economic, religious) structures of exclusion and oppression resulting in impoverishment, are central to the message of the gospel. This reflection is part of a wider process of integrating faith perspectives into gender discussions, enhanced in the Lutheran Communion. Just as

violence against women was addressed through the document “Churches say ‘No’ to violence against women”¹, it is proposed now to discuss and design actions and processes on gender justice. The discussion on gender as a theological instrument developed in this document seeks to connect with constructive, forward-looking advocacy and human rights movements in society to ensure that women experience equality in their lives.

We strongly commend the reflections and proposals contained in this document to various groups for contextualization, continuing study and implementation. These groups include pastors, theological students, Bible study groups, women’s groups, men’s groups, university students in social fields, etc.

This document does not claim to be complete in terms of the discussion on women and gender issues. It contains biblical and theological reflections based on global experiences gained through a program coordinated by the Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk. It is intended as a discussion starter to provide input to motivate concrete actions and to develop meaningful processes in gender justice in the communion. It is important to contextualize and adapt the language and the issues addressed to the reality of the various geo-political contexts.

This is an invitation to a faith reflection on gender and power, highlighting God’s restoration of human dignity in relationships based not on domination, but on love and justice.

Ishmael Noko
General Secretary



¹ “Churches say ‘No’ to violence against women”. Action Plan for the churches. Lutheran World Federation, 2002. www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DMD/DMD-WICAS.html#Violence



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PREFACE

After ten years of ministry as Secretary for Women in Church and Society in the Lutheran World Federation Department for Mission and Development, and a life-long journey of working with women and men in interfaith living, it has been a privilege to contribute in the production of this document. Such an experience was nurtured by the remarkable wisdom of men and women of faith across the continents, the challenges raised by young visionaries, and the moving trust and innocence of children, all of whom hope for a better world.

Even with these blessings, it has not been easy to lift up or mainstream gender either in the LWF Geneva Secretariat or among the churches. The ministry called for enduring diplomacy and art of negotiation in mutual respect. The “glass ceiling” that faces women is as prevalent as the resistance to change harbored by others. But even though violence against women and gender bias are evident in member churches, recognition of the gifts brought by women is also forthcoming. Openness among men and women’s persistence provide positive impulses in the strengthening of work on gender. Men have often taken the lead in introducing agenda on gender, and in reducing violence. Such transforming behavior brings hope, pointing to the need to press on before complacency sets in.

This document is intended not to explain how integral gender is to all human development initiatives, be they social, economic, or political, either in church or society, but how faith could enhance and complement our understanding of gender and power. There is reflection on past commitments of the Lutheran communion in relation to gender, as well as analysis of the relevance and importance of gender issues as perceived and envisioned by church leaders and representatives over more than sixty years of LWF history. There is also exploration of how to further guide the communion as a sign and expression of inclusiveness.

Grounded in the basic biblical understanding of gender and power, the document includes experiential input from the work of the LWF. It is intended for church leaders, both lay and clergy, men and women, to help readers determine whether the churches have been able to “walk the talk.” Reflecting on gender and power with Jesus as touchstone, it furthers understanding of a few core principles and the ethos of being a faith-based communion.

Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), according to LWF practice. Readers are, however, invited to use other versions in discussion of how biblical language shapes our way of thinking about gender. In addition, feminist perspectives in theology are used to recognize and affirm not only women writers but also men, who reject patriarchy and reread through feminist eyes to maintain a life of complementarity and mutuality. To lend a global and communion perspective, the included texts have been revised based on comments and valuable input from readers including theologians, pastors, laypeople, students, women’s networks, and gender promoters among men and youth.

The aim is not to provide a finalized publication but rather a discussion starter and work in progress, to be appropriated and adapted to national and regional church contexts, and to its own local specificity. The aim is also invitational because compliance and transformation must come from within.

Gender perspective is a learned discipline, a call to and reaffirmation of a discipleship of equals that could be transformative. Leaders are invited, therefore, to reflect on gender and power for the purpose of greater effectiveness throughout their diverse responsibilities. As they clarify and define where the LWF stands in terms of gender as well as its profile as an inclusive communion, it



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is hoped that the included texts will also be of use to those in leadership in faith-based development networks, mission agencies, and other partners; and that, in turn, they will have some bearing on the LWF's ecumenical and working relations. They also are presented as a reminder of, and to retain, gender as an analytical tool for mainstream use throughout the issues and themes in which the LWF engages.

The Word of God, the Lutheran affirmation of faith, and God's gracious and loving accompaniment both formed, and informed, the drafting of this document. It was sponsored by the Church of Sweden and Norwegian Church Aid.

It is my hope and prayer that this publication will further the concept of discipleship of equals, a priesthood of all believers whereby women and men, young and old, feel called to sit at a roundtable bringing their gifts, uniqueness, and complementarity to: "...event' the good news of Jesus Christ in all situations. It is important to keep in mind that we are witnesses in word and

deed."¹ It is not only words of solidarity that the world is seeking, but also deeds of reconciliation, with our own selves, with God, with others, and with nature, so that the in-breaking reign of God becomes more tangible.

May God bless, and use, the gifts each one of us has to offer in promoting a caring and inclusive communion that embodies Christ, and reflects God's love, peace and joy for God's glory!

Priscilla Singh
Department for Mission and Development
The Lutheran World Federation

¹ Péri Rasolondraibe, *In Search of a Round Table - Gender, Theology & Church Leadership*, ed. Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), p. vii.

INTRODUCTION

GENDER JUSTICE: A COMMUNION COMMITMENT

So God created humankind in his image
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them
Gen 1:27 (NRSV).

So God created man in His own image, in the image
and likeness of God He created him; male and female
He created them
Gen 1:27 (AMP).

Why Should the Churches Reflect on Gender in Relation to Power?

To many, “gender” is an unclear term. A majority still understand it as something to do with women, by women, of women, and for women. Some might also feel it is an issue superseded by more life-threatening issues such as conflict and war, poverty, HIV and AIDS, terrorism, climate change, water scarcity, and the economic recession sucking the world into a downward spiral of destabilization, fear, and insecurity. Surprisingly, the concept of gender offers an analytical tool to understand the “why” of these difficulties and how to make a greater impact in addressing them, by using gender as a crosscutting theme. It enables understanding of how power operates to the disadvantage of many in any system. Gender analysis helps, particularly, in better discernment of ourselves, our relationships with others, and makes personal and collective transformation possible.

Gender and “power” are complex concepts extremely challenging to elucidate, let alone be understood. They involve specific interplay, each with influence over the other. It is, therefore, easier to begin by using an example of how a theme, or issue, might be analyzed with gender input by asking questions such as: “What does it mean for women?” “How are they disempowered?” “How can their concerns, experience, and expertise be

included?” And, “What impact does this have on men and society?” For example, the Ecumenical Women’s Network, at the United Nations (UN) fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2009, made the following observations about caregiving in the context of HIV and AIDS: “The fact that nearly 90% of caregiving falls to women exposes that there is no equal sharing of responsibility between men and women anywhere in the world. ...As millions of people die, women are at the bedsides of the sick. This act of mercy takes women away from their livelihoods and providing for their children, creating a tragic cycle of poverty and vulnerability.”¹

The Ecumenical Women’s network made the following proposal: “The pandemic demands bold and creative approaches, which must recognize the reality of power and gender roles which have contributed to the disempowerment of women. Gender equality must be realized to stop the victimization of women. We recognize that as religious organizations we have a role in creating the cultures that work to redefine gender roles and responsibilities.”² Keeping such gender consciousness, and working toward equity and equality, is the basis of gender concept.

Gender as a methodological tool can explicitly bring out the disparity in power relationships based on the biological differences of sex. This could facilitate public policies that advocate citizenship rights, and transform unjust structures thus promoting fundamental inclusiveness for all human beings.

At this point, it is appropriate to focus on the gender commitments of recent LWF assemblies, and ask the basic question that Luther has taught

¹ UN ECOSOC, CSW 53rd session, Advocacy Statement <http://ecumenicalwomen.files.wordpress.com/2008/11/ecumenicalwomensw53.pdf> (March 2009).

² *Ibid.*

to ask: “What does this mean for us?” Note should be made that some of the gender commitments of LWF assemblies are quite binding whereas others are invitational. But some church leaders tend to think that gender commitments are driven by the LWF Secretariat. So they develop a tendency to resist or disregard such commitments. It is important that churches keep in mind that these commitments are made at LWF assemblies by the delegates they sent as their own representatives and spokespeople. So the churches need to welcome and own these commitments, and address them in their regional and local settings in a sense of obligation to the communion. This could also help the member churches to hold each other accountable to the collectively made commitments, and more systematically make progress toward common goals.

From commitments made at the 1997 LWF Ninth and 2003 LWF Tenth Assemblies, (cf. *Appendix I*), it became clear that gender was considered as one of the priority themes for discussion and practice within the Lutheran communion. As a faith-based communion the LWF has not only to view gender from a secular and human rights perspective, as a development theme, or an issue that affects women, but also as a faith issue that should be programmatically addressed at the level of the LWF Secretariat and by the member churches and regional expressions.

Such commitments have yielded good results in enabling the LWF to formulate gender policies such as: participation of “40% male 40% female and 20% youth,” which the Secretariat has endeavored to maintain against all odds and with some difficulty, at LWF assemblies. The composition of the LWF Council, the federation’s governing body between assemblies, ensures leadership of 40 percent women and 10 percent young women with opportunities to chair the various committees among men, women, and youth. LWF assemblies and leadership opportunities for women have furthered positive change in the communion in three different ways. They have:

1. helped enact pro-women policies in the Secretariat, such as 40 percent of scholarships earmarked for women to study theology; and “ensure that the staff of the Department for

Theology and Studies (DTS) include a theologian with a background in Feminist Theology in order to help develop women’s perspectives in studies and discussions in the LWF and in member churches.”³

2. created policy decisions to ensure that financial assistance through projects is given only to those seminaries that also admit women students; and that projects that concentrate on gender education, or on reducing violence against women, be given priority.
3. These policy decisions also brought changes to the LWF agenda. Many issues close to women’s hearts that affect everyday living in an intimate way were tabled and committed upon, e.g., the issues of violence against women, a caring economy, and climate change, among others.

Current Reality

Carrying out a “gender watch” or “gender policing” is specifically among tasks of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) and Department for World Service (DWS). To a certain extent, gender accountability is expected from all staff. These policies sometimes are overlooked or ignored because of difficulty in finding women to lead, getting churches to nominate women, or because women feel they do not have the expertise. It is then up to the DMD desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) to step in.

While the LWF Secretariat concentrates on gender education, gender input, advocacy, and equal participation and leadership, the member churches are encouraged to continue to promote:

- Emphasis that women and men are made in the image of God, to be equal and responsible as stewards while we enjoy and care for the whole of God’s creation.

³ Minutes, LWF Council meeting, Geneva, 1996. Report of the Program Committee for Mission and Development, p. 25

- Understanding that we are baptized into equal fellowship as women and men, youth and children.
- Affirmation that we are encouraged and energized by the Holy Spirit that is poured out on all flesh. And,
- Trust that the Doctrine of Justification is a gracious invitation of God in faith that excludes no-one, neither male nor female, young nor old.

After long advocacy and commitment, the LWF has moved from beginning to ensure women’s participation, to having women in leadership, putting gender on the agenda, and now seeking gender accountability; even though it is still a challenging task. Compounding difficulty in keeping the promise of gender equality and justice is the constant turnover of new leaders in the Secretariat and member churches, some of whom are not oriented in organizational gender commitment, or ignoring it as emanating from the LWF Secretariat agenda. So the main challenge is to keep on orienting, reminding, and holding one another accountable. To achieve this within the Secretariat, orienting the churches and decision-makers to the commitments on gender every time a new employee is recruited, is imperative. The communion’s commitments on gender also should become part of the work directive for church leadership.

One of the main outcomes of recent LWF assemblies is the concept of “communion.” To expand it to read “inclusive communion,” could well define what the LWF is, and does. Although the Secretariat uses the term “inclusivity” when describing its activities, a more strategic addition such as “The Lutheran World Federation: An Inclusive Communion of Churches” would certainly give added value and profile as to its stand on gender. It would also be a constant reminder to purposely address gender issues as a core principle of justice and transformation in the LWF.

For every issue, there is a gender dimension and accentuation needing, therefore, a gender-specific response. This is not best addressed by

just adding women as participants to numerically exhibit an equal opportunity, or include them in some leadership roles, which might end up as tokenism. It is also a misconception that all women are gender-aware or that they automatically want to promote gender equality. When it was suggested to a bright young woman theologian that she do her doctoral studies on gender, she declined, saying that that would undervalue her competence since gender and that she would never be taken seriously as a theologian. She was honest in her reality, but this only goes to prove that it would be wrong to assume that women would automatically be gender-aware or promote gender issues.

Gender equality is a continuum. Subsequent gender auditing and evaluation, therefore, is necessary to safeguard that we do not come to a standstill. For example, in the ordination of women, attention needs to be sustained as to whether they find their calls in congregations, whether they are paid and valued as much as men, whether they are not sent off to serve in remote and isolated areas, and whether they have opportunities for upward mobility.

An analysis of power and gender together provides us with an effective hermeneutic key to understand and address the different positions people hold with regard to gender concepts. Within ecumenical circles, women could be grouped into three levels of understanding of ministry or work with women. One level relates to some feminist theologians, pioneers who do not want to give up on the term “feminism” and who resist the use of “gender.” In their understanding, gender is a compromise. One remark made by a woman leader is quite forthright. She said, “Gender concept is a sleeping pill for women’s advancement!” Secondly, there is a group of women who have learned from some of the setbacks wrought in their local setting through a misunderstanding of feminism, do not want to subscribe to it. They want to walk a middle path that includes women and men in all processes. Thirdly, there is a group of women leaders who think that feminism is outdated, and that individual accomplishment is all that matters to be leaders. Some of them forget that whatever benefits they enjoy with regard to equality are due

to the historical women's movement that created a conducive climate and proactive policies.

Such a journey of women's rights helps us to understand feminism also as a political concept. This implies transformative actions in public spheres, and policies with concrete changes for women's lives, in which women and men should have the same socio-economic spaces and cultural rights, and in which equal justice should overcome prejudices.

There are women who think gender equality is yet to be attained in what are termed "third-world countries." Some women even fear that talking about gender issues jeopardizes their leadership or reduces their self-worth as leaders. Some do not want to talk about gender because they feel they would be confined to being recognized only as gender police. There have also been exceptions of women working against women, and men who are totally committed to working for gender issues as the right and just thing to do. It is a misconception that all men are perpetrators, violators, patriarchal, or controllers of power. There have been instances where men have been more supportive and vocal on gender issues than some women.

Similarly, men can range from feminist to patron, and uninterested actor or unwilling participant, to even hostile to women's advancement. While some are very committed and consciously promote gender justice, others feel pressurized to contemplate policies they have neither formulated nor committed to. Such unconvinced or hostile leaders could severely set back the gender agenda. The profile and functions of gender inclusivity could be lost during their leadership period if they hold positions with decision-making powers.

"Like most privileged groups, men fear that equality means in practice loss of power, authority and privilege. Fear and lack of understanding beget resistance, conservatism and even chauvinism. And our own fear of these reactions is an additional challenge."⁴ Those men who are feminists that encourage gender inclusivity, appearing to

support and help women, are often seen as weak and unable to control and exercise their manly power. Some men feel victimized when women talk of violence and abuse and feel collectively accused and shamed. All these emotions, role expectations, and blurring of roles, have to be taken into account.

Emotions, therefore, could be an authentic hermeneutic key to understanding gender as it is also a category often used to differentiate and distinguish men over women. Men have long been seen as rational beings, expected to be strong and decisive, while women have been considered as emotional beings, therefore weak and dependent. But current management training programs highlight emotionality as an authentic human response, a key to building knowledge based on both the rational and the emotional. They include emotional intelligence as an important tool of discernment and decision making. Men are learning not to be afraid to show caring and nurturing emotions as partners and parents, and women are less apologetic for, or guilty about their leadership roles. These are positive signs that need to be embraced and lifted up as models. "Men can find the way to spiritual unity by getting back in touch with the emotionally open part of themselves. Only through this liberation will they lay claim to the rich and rewarding inner lives that have historically been the exclusive province of women."⁵

Guiding Questions for Further Reflection

1. Are there any gender specific policies enacted, and/or plans of action in your church/organization?
2. Is gender analysis used in all programs in terms of participation, leadership, agenda, and evaluation?

⁴ Péri Rasolondraibe, *In Search of a Round Table - Gender, Theology & Church Leadership*, ed. Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), p. vii.

⁵ Bell Hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2005), www.ebookmall.com/ebook/143787-ebook.htm

CHAPTER I

RATIONALE FOR A GENDER APPROACH

“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”
Gal 3:28 (NRSV).

Defining Gender

“Gender refers to socially constructed differences in attributes and opportunities associated with being female or male and to the social interactions and relationships between women and men. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in the roles and responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as in decision-making opportunities.

“Gender equality means equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women and men, girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same but that women’s and men’s opportunities, rights and responsibilities do not depend on whether they are born female or male. It implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration.”¹

In simple terms, gender is the way we organize our lives as males and females, our relationships, our roles, and responsibilities. People have long been socialized into believing that the different roles and status accorded to men and women in society are determined by biology, i.e., sex, and that these are natural, constant, and unchangeable, in order to maintain an orderly and effective social system. These specified roles are informed, shaped, and

maintained by multiple structures like family, community, society, ethnicity, and race. They are sustained and perpetuated through forms of culture, language, education, media, and diverse faith beliefs. Such a view does not explain the unjustifiable inequalities that exist between women and men. Like the inequalities that exist between classes and races, between North and South, East and West, inequality between women and men is created by historical, social, religious, and cultural constructs. They can, therefore, be questioned, challenged, and changed. In short, gender is socialized role expectation and behavior relating to men and women. “It is a learned and enforced behavior. It varies with culture, varies within culture and changes over time.”²

What Is Gender Analysis?

It is usually believed that equality in society could be achieved by providing women and men with equal opportunities, education, and skills. Many years of investing in development has taught that, first of all, it is difficult to provide access to equal opportunities for men and women, because of their differing social status and access to power. Even if such equal opportunities are availed they may not bring equal results for men and women. Different treatment of women and men, therefore, may sometimes be required to compensate for the persisting discrimination between men and women, and to achieve similitude of results.

Gender analysis is a tool to understand these disparities between women and men’s realities in any context. It is conscious that the same issue affects men and women differently and disproportionately and challenges the notion that everybody is affected by an issue in the same way regardless

¹ UN report on The World’s Women 2005: Progress in Statistics, Introduction, p. 1, http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/ww2005_pub/English/WW2005

² “Concept of Gender: A Just Analytical Tool,” *LWF Women* magazine, No. 53, p. 38.

of their contexts. Therefore gender analysis by using surveys, research or fact finding through gender-disaggregated data would bring to light the previously hidden or obscure anomalies like differing social realities, socialization processes, role expectations, economic circumstances, access to and power over resources. Such an analysis and data would facilitate and enhance the designing of policies, practices, or projects, to bridge the gender gaps between women and men and promote greater equality and justice, and with greater effectiveness.³

Gender Differences that Disadvantage Women

Role Differentiation and Stereotyping

A division of labor built on a person's sex allocates specific roles to women and men. Due to gender division of labor, men assume control over land, technology, credit, and cash from the sale of produce, whereas more women tend to produce for a self-subsistent livelihood and to nurture the family. Since women's labor is not commodified, and their produce for the family not assigned with any monetary value, their labor is neither accounted for nor valued. Some women from the African continent suffered when an economic development model concentrated on cash crops, instead of food crops, and addressed men as producers thereby discounting women. The cash went to the men, and most of it was not used to support the family. Women lost control over the produce and had to work even harder and longer to produce food crops to feed their families, as well as continuing to produce the cash crops. Development, in this instance, did not benefit women. It doubled their stress and labor.

It is a fact that education could lift people out of poverty but vast differences still persist, with more boys entering higher education than girls. The subjects that girls and boys study also

reflect this disparity. Therefore, gender hierarchy cannot be removed by education or development alone if no serious attempts are made to change patriarchal structures and attitudes, the fixation over men's and women's roles, and the differing values attached to their labor.

Differences in Power Relations

Different role allocation also means different power relations. People are assigned differing amounts of power, authority and control over other people, resources, and decision making. So gender relations not only influence behavior between men and women but also among men. For example, in some Asian contexts the bride's father and family are considered inferior to the bridegroom's father and family even if they have a better economic and social standing. This can be the opposite in some African countries. Current trends in politics both in the West and East include controversial debate on women's dress codes and their bodies. Gender relations are therefore relations of dominance and subordination with elements of ownership, cooperation, force, and violence, sustaining them. Because of these inequalities, several social scientists regard the family as a place of bargaining and confrontation where power is negotiated. The Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen calls this a "co-operation and conflict model."

Low Valuation of Women's Economic Contribution

According to the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) 1995 Human Development Report, which specialized in costing women's invisible and unpaid work around the world, women's annual economic contribution is worth USD 11 trillion. At the top level, a more recent study from Corporate Women Directors International (CWDI) reveals a "low female representation on the corporate boards of the 100 largest companies in the world. Worse yet, the study shows even fewer women serving as senior officers, generally considered a stepping-stone toward directorship,

³ Adapted from *Gender-based analysis: a guide for policy-making*, (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada), www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/IWRM/Toolboxes/gender/gender_based_analysis.pdf (March 1996).

since the number of women CEOs is also very small (2% in Fortune’s global listing).⁴

“The ratio of the annual averages of women’s and men’s median annual earnings was 77.8 for full-time workers in 2007. (This means the gender wage gap is now 22.2 percent.)”⁵ Seventy percent of the world’s poorest and illiterate people are women and children. Women’s roles, in particular, have multiplied in recent years in addition to their productive, reproductive, and nurturing responsibilities. For example, trade expansion has increased the women’s labor force in export processing. But global restructuring of industries such as textiles has increased subcontracting which reduces the status and rights of workers, and increases the number of “sweat-shops,” which mostly employ women. There is an increase in home-based labor, paid at a set rate per unit with little status, benefit, or protection of workers’ rights. Such undervaluation of women’s worth and work indirectly leads to social problems such as prostitution, domestic violence, and trafficking of women and girls.

Exploitative Social, Economic and Political Systems and Structures

“There are considerable differences in women’s and men’s access to and opportunities to exert power over economic structures in their societies. In most parts of the world, women are virtually absent from or are poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay.”⁶

Like gender and gender relations, the gender division of labor is specific to culture, location, and time. Between one to two-thirds of working women are concentrated in the textile and food-

processing sectors, or in jobs that are extensions of their nurturing role such as nursing, teaching, and secretarial assistance. When the Taliban leadership took over in Afghanistan, the first instruction they issued was that men should wear caps and grow beards, while women should cover themselves, and remain indoors. “It is interesting to see a new political regime and the gender regime that comes into force and the way gender division of labor is reinforced. The sexual division of labor therefore is not a structure in its own right. It is part of a system of production, consumption and distribution which is structured by gender.”⁷

But not all women are subordinate to all men. A rich woman because of her class, or an executive because of her job, is in a position of dominance over men who work under her. Similarly, the ruling class, upper caste, or race, might use its power to exploit and keep in subjugation those who are dependent on them. Raping women in conflict situations is a classic example of a means of exploitation to exercise control and dominion. Rape is used as a weapon in war and conflict to exercise power. It is used to discipline or punish the rebellious poor, peasants, landless laborers, races, people of color, ethnic groups, or countries in conflict that gather up the courage to organize themselves and protest. Those who have a status of power beat up men, destroy their property, and rape their women. As women in many customs are still seen as men’s property, it is not only land that is taken over but also women’s bodies. “The rape of their women teaches poor men the lesson that their status is one of absolute powerlessness and propertylessness.”⁸ Therefore, to protect the honor of men and the community, and to maintain purity of race, many women are restricted in their mobility and ways of dressing, and are given fewer opportunities for education and employment. Women who remain within the household, as dependents or in seclusion, are considered as symbols of social status in many patriarchal societies.

⁴ The Institute for Women’s Policy Research IWPR, *Fact Sheet* (April 2007)

⁵ IWPR *Fact Sheet*, No. C350 (August 2008)

⁶ Women Watch, Information and Resources on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, Women and the Economy, www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/women_and_the_economy_3006.htm

⁷ Vasantha Kannabiran, *Sharing the Fish-Head: The Philosophy and Practice of Gender Training in South Asia* (New Delhi: Asia-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, 1996), pp. 36-37.

⁸ Maria Mies, “Class Struggles and Women’s Struggles in Rural India” in *Women: The Last Colony* (London: Zed, 1988), p. 38.

The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report for 2008 points out that: “Women account for half of the world’s population and half of its talent. The costs of not developing and using this talent are huge.”⁹ The Global Gender Gap Index continues to track the strong correlation between the gender gap and national competitiveness and sends a clear message to policymakers to incorporate gender equality into their national priorities. “The most important determinant of a country’s competitiveness is its human talent—the skills, education and productivity of its workforce—and women account for one-half of the potential talent base throughout the world. Over time, therefore, a nation’s competitiveness depends significantly on whether and how it educates and utilizes its female talent.

“Each country should strive for gender equality—i.e., to give women the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as men. In the current global financial and economic crisis, it is more vital than ever that women’s economic participation does not shrink, but is in fact seen as an opportunity to make headway. The minds and talents of both women and men will be needed to produce the most creative solutions and to prevent such crises in the future.”¹⁰

The Role of Patriarchy as an Ideology

Patriarchy is an ideology or a belief system according to which men are held superior and responsible for those under their care or control. Religious interpretations, cultural practices and institutionalized structures have played a key role in creating and perpetuating the patriarchal ideology, and their justification for it, in social behavior and socio-economic structures. Media and even some educational institutions continue to spread this ideology by showing men in strong decision-making positions, and women as vor-

acious consumers, decorative pieces, sex objects, or helpless victims. Some areas of women’s lives under patriarchal control are their productivity and labor, reproduction and sexuality, mobility and access to educational and economic resources, entry into social and cultural spheres, and in some societies, a restrictive dress code. When women stand for public office, it is often the way they are dressed and how expensively, how well they have functioned as wives and mothers, and what kind of family life they have led that are all brought into public reckoning much more than would be the case for a man aspiring to such public office.

The patriarchal system is so entrenched that it is almost invincible. What is more, it appears so natural that women themselves perpetuate the system. A rural woman explained the phenomenon of women oppressing other women in this way: “Men in our families are like the sun, they have a light of their own (they own resources, are mobile, have freedom to take decision, etc.). Women are like satellites, without any light of their own. They shine only if and when the sun’s light touches them. This is why women have to constantly compete with each other for a bigger share of sunlight, because without this light there is no life.”¹¹

Male control over women does not necessarily mean that it leads to violence of all forms all the time. The control could be subtle, i.e., almost invisible and therefore invincible. It is “paternalistic dominance.” It has mutual obligations for women and men and therefore is not perceived as oppressive to either women or men. Rather, it would be seen simply as allocation of duties between men and women, which would offer stability to the family and orderliness in society. It is seen as protecting women and not as oppressive to women.

The right-wing movement within Christianity supports such notions through aggressive media propaganda, which is increasingly impacting a volatile world. In an interview with Kathryn Joyce, who has been carrying out research on the right-wing Christian pro-fertility sects in the United States of America, Joyce remarked that such movements *specifically object to* “...acceptance of nontraditional

⁹ Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson, Saadia Zahidi, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2008* (Geneva: World Economic Forum), www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2008.pdf (2008), p. 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹¹ Kamla Bhasin, *Understanding Gender*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000), p. 23.

family roles, or the church staying out of family planning decisions; women teaching or leading in church, and especially women’s ordination; acceptance of birth control, and of women working; in some denominations, even women speaking in church at all.”¹² Some of these ideas are manifested in a few churches within the LWF communion where, sometimes, women are not even permitted to read Bible texts at Sunday services.

Language: The Medium that Also Becomes a Message

To a large extent, language is not only an expression of our thinking but also one of the media that shapes our thinking. The use of masculine words is often set as the standard. One still current example is use of the term “mankind” instead of “humankind.” Certain terms and roles in our languages are gender-ascriptive (where gender is inbuilt) such as uncle-aunt, brother-sister, and mother-father, because they indicate the sex of a person. There are, however, many others that are not gender-ascriptive, but it is nonetheless presumed that they refer either to a man or to a woman. For example, the jobs of secretary, nurse, and kindergarten teacher, are usually assumed to refer to women whereas boss, pilot, manager, surgeon, or farmer, are assumed to refer to men.

Specifically in and through churches, the language used for God shapes the thinking and orientation not only of the corporate faith community but also of its individual members. “While officially it is rightly and consistently said that God is spirit and so beyond identification with either male or female sex, yet the daily language of preaching, worship, catechesis, and instruction conveys a different message... .”¹³ The language used in the Bible, and often by many churches, to describe God is mostly in masculine form: father,

king, and lord, which can indirectly reinforce the male model of leadership. “When God is called father, a cluster of masculine attributes adheres. And whatever individual property, quality and trait we ascribe to God, it will be construed against the background of that cluster. I call this a dual process of gender signification.”¹⁴

Women theologians have contributed significantly to bringing inclusivity into our thinking of God in feminine images, and also to look at God beyond gender.

The Role of Religions in Identity Construction

Religion plays a very important role as an identity-giver and identity-fixer. Interpretations of texts are mainly in the hands of those who have gained authority over religious structures and instruction, and who have the opportunity and power to shape the thinking and behavior of the masses. Institutionalized religions have not favored women as much as they have men, even though feminist interpretations and theologizing have attempted to overcome these disparities. Some of the impact feminist theologians have made in theological education include:

- broadening perspective in the field of biblical theology by including a re-reading of Scripture, feminist exegesis, and hermeneutics.
- highlighting the key roles of women in biblical history by exposing the existence of women without names, and documenting their varied contributions despite women’s invisibility in the Bible.
- providing fresh and refreshing input on spirituality, as well as new ways of worship, and popularizing them by forging networks and alliances across boundaries, and by explicitly

¹² Interview, Kathryn Joyce, *Quiverfull*, <http://globalcomment.com/2009/quiverfull-an-interview-with-kathryn-joyce/>, (April 2009).

¹³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ Anne-Louise Eriksson, *The Meaning of Gender in Theology. Problems and Possibilities* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Uppsala Women’s Studies. A. Women in Religion 6, 1995), p. 41.

voicing women's concerns that have hitherto been excluded in societal and church life.

- challenging the purely rationalist, clinical, and dispassionate ways of theologizing by beginning with women's stories and experiences that elevate and authenticate emotions to a higher level than has so far been ascribed.
- emphasizing the need for behavioral change within the churches' very being, when women gained entry into the ordained ministry and decision-making bodies.
- calling for a serious analysis and rethinking of "power" and how it is exercised in faith communities.
- persistently challenging the churches to be worshiping and intergenerational communities rather than hierarchical structures.

Despite these rich and significant groundbreaking contributions of women through feminist theologizing, churches have not paid due attention, and have instead tended to consider them as sub-standard, or even heretical. The challenge is to disseminate and popularize these contributions that are now very much confined to academics and women's meetings. In addition, there are two emerging and worrisome trends: right-wing movements and secularization. On the one hand, there is an increase in extremism and right-wing movements that want to prescribe stereotyped roles and behavior for men and women, which comes as a backlash against women's movements; and, on the other, there is religion confined to personal piety with no corporate or societal transformation.

In the past few years, the concept of human development has given way to a sectoral approach concentrating on a few aspects of life, e.g., the UN Millennium Development Goals highlight eight objectives including gender equality to be attained by the year 2015. Such a well-intentioned though splintered approach cannot adequately address the basic fabric of society, nor the attitudes, cultures, traditions, and theologies that shape the thinking, and therefore the gender behavior of

people. A sectoral approach loses connectivity, lessens the impact of all initiative and misses the opportunity of promoting a dynamic movement of social change. For example, ensuring education for girls does not automatically provide them with choices, jobs, or mobility. They might still be under the control of men in their families who would decide for them according to what they perceive to be in the best interest of the women and that of their families. So education might not elevate girls' social status automatically unless their social condition is jointly addressed to provide an enabling environment.

The following data provides the differing impact on men and women. Local contexts may vary, but the hard data proves the need for a sustained investment in women's advancement as part of a gender strategy.

Women's Education

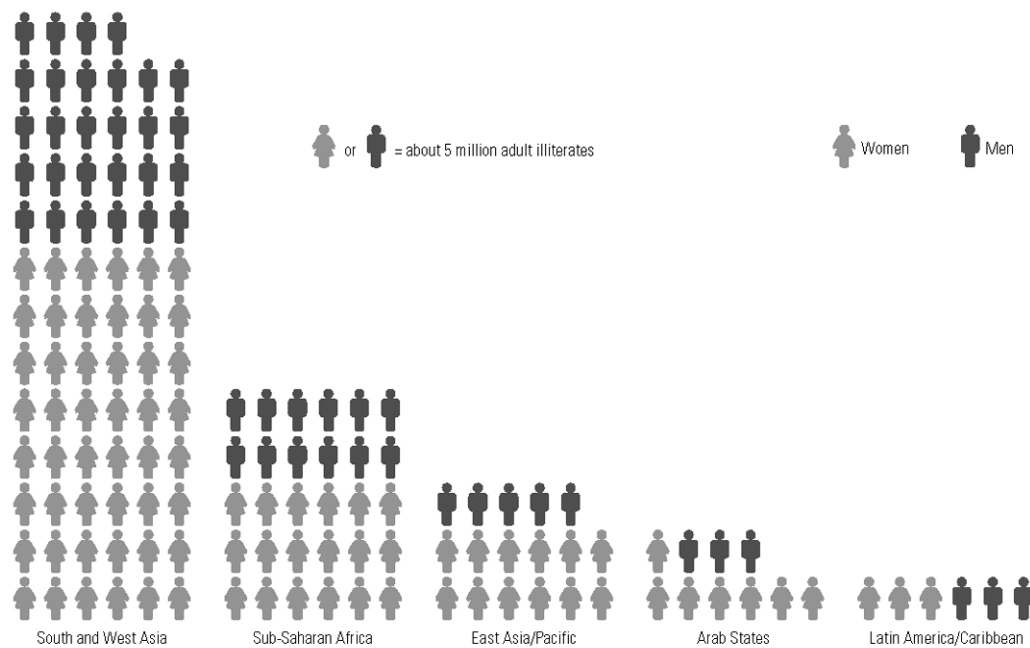
UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Press release No. 2008-115 on "Inequality undermining education opportunities for millions of children" shows the following:¹⁵

The challenge of equal access to education is not restricted just to a formal level. Targeting more equitable access to education not only would improve the lives of individual women but also, if gender mainstreams the formation process, would advance the community as a whole.

Schools also perpetuate gender prejudices. These must be addressed, as can be seen in a story shared by a young woman participant in a project called "Youth Acting against Gender Violence" organized by an ecumenical body in Brazil. She drew attention to this gender bias in formal education, as follows: "Sometimes school can be a place of prejudice and very confusing for young women from marginalized communities. Nevertheless for me, education represents the only way to overcome my situation. This remains

¹⁵ "Inequality undermining education opportunities for millions of children," *UNESCO Press release* No.2008-115, www.unesco.org/education/gmr2009/press/GMR2009_pressrelease_EN.pdf (November 2008).

Figure 6: Projected number of adult illiterates (age 15+), by gender and region, 2015



Source: See Table 2.11 in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009.

true despite a teacher saying about me: ‘Poor girl, her mother was a prostitute and her father a drug addict! She can only go the same way!’ But I decided that it would be different for me. I want another life different from that foreseen by my teacher. I’ll go further. Even if I live in a place which is not a good example to anyone, this project helps us not to lose hope. These workshops help all of us young people to think about what we want in life.”¹⁶

Economic Globalization, Climate Change, and Food Justice

The new marketplace defies certain ethical standards and implies that the market can only be won by some at the expense of others. Women are further marginalized: firstly, because there is less space for them in the order of hierarchy. Secondly, because of the re-establishment of gender division of labor, they are re-confined to the private and reproductive spheres. Thirdly, with less access

to resources, they have less bargaining capacity. Additionally, visual media have been aggressively promoting a concept of women as consumers with “sexy” bodies. This has escalated women’s aspirations to have perfect bodies leading them to starve or binge, as well as undergo cosmetic surgery; an indication of devaluation of their self-worth as persons.

There is a distinct interconnectedness between gender inequality and economic and social injustice. The rigidity of socially ascribed gender roles and their consequent limitation of women’s access to power structures, education, training, and production resources, are among the practical reasons that situate women in poverty.

The UNDP 2007 Human Development Report states that “climate change is likely to magnify existing patterns of gender inequalities.”¹⁷ Eco Feminist movements have been demanding a more eco-centric approach than an economic one. Gender analysis portrays disproportionate ways in which women are affected with regard to access to water, firewood, medicines, and a

¹⁶ *Juventude tramando contra a violência de gênero*. Relatório de projeto. (São Leopoldo: CECA - Centro Ecumenico de Evangelização, Capacitação e Assessoria, 2009), p. 12

¹⁷ cf. *Manila Declaration for Global Action on Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction*, gender-climate.org/docs/Manila_Declaration_Final_Final.doc (October 2008).

livelihood. Wangari Maathai, who won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her work on sustainable development, remarked that, “Climate change is harder on women in poor countries where mothers stay in areas hit by drought, deforestation or crop failure as men move to literally greener pastures.” She said: “Many destructive activities against the environment disproportionately affect women, because most women in the world, and especially in the developing world, are very dependent on primary natural resources: land, forests, and waters. Women are very immediately affected, and usually women and children can’t run away.”¹⁸

Some consequences of economic globalization are the transformation of agricultural land into industrial areas displacing peasants and indigenous workers, and the entry of multinational companies into agro-business ventures. This causes subsistence landowning farmers to become laborers without choice in the selection of crops and their pricing and use and distribution of the produce. This, in turn leads to over-production of selected cash crops, and use of genetic modification and pesticides that inflict harm on people and biodiversity, as well as the patenting and marketing of local knowledge.

All these attributes of globalization, in turn, marginalize women through feminization of poverty, of jobs, and of migration that leads more women into unorganized sectors. Subsequently, they are further exploited through trafficking and the sex industry, and an increase in family violence reinforced by frustration, unemployment, and individualism. Migration of people due to poverty and loss of traditional livelihoods causes families to break up. It is mostly women who are left with the responsibility of caring for the family; or, the children are left abandoned to the streets facing high risks. When the debt crisis hit Latin American countries, many men lost their jobs but women were still able to retain their low-paid jobs. Unemployed men in a “machista” culture found it hard to be jobless and dependent. They became more inclined toward alcohol, drugs, and domestic violence. This is one of the main reasons for women in the Latin American churches to persistently advocate for gender education, the

overcoming of poverty, for food sovereignty, and for lifting up positive masculine models.

HIV and AIDS

The face of HIV and AIDS has become female, young and poor as the result of cultural practices such as polygamy and widow inheritance, and the phenomenon of “sugar daddies” preying on vulnerable young women or of men refusing to have protected sex.

Gender norms related to masculinity encourage men to have more sexual partners, and older men to have sexual relations with much younger women. In some settings, this contributes to higher infection rates among young women (15–24 years) compared to young men. Norms linked to femininity prevent women—especially young women—from accessing HIV-related information and services. Only 38 percent of young women have accurate, comprehensive knowledge of HIV and AIDS, according to 2008 UNAIDS global figures. Violence against women is another element that increases their vulnerability to HIV infection.

Women who fear or experience violence, lack the power to ask their partners to use condoms, or refuse unprotected sex. Fear of violence can prevent them from learning and/or sharing about their HIV status, and accessing treatment.

There are gender-related barriers that hinder both women and men from learning about prevention of, and treatment for HIV infection. Women may face barriers due to their lack of access to and control over resources, child-care responsibilities, restricted mobility, and limited decision-making power. The socialization of men may mean that they will not seek HIV-related services due to fear of stigma and discrimination, of losing their jobs, or being perceived as “weak” or “unmanly.”

Lack of education and economic security affects millions of women and girls, whose literacy levels are generally lower than men and boys. Many women, especially those living with HIV, lose their homes, inheritance, possessions, livelihoods, and even their children when their partners die. This forces many women to adopt

¹⁸ www.reuters.com/article/idUSN0633990420080507

survival strategies that increase their chances of contracting and spreading HIV. Educating girls makes them better equipped to take safer sexual decisions.

“Women assume the major share of care-giving in the family, including for those living with and affected by HIV. This is often unpaid and is based on the assumption that women ‘naturally’ fill this role. ... Many national HIV/AIDS programmes fail to address underlying gender inequalities.”¹⁹

Violence against Women

“Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime—with the abuser usually someone known to her. Perhaps the most pervasive human rights violation that we know today, it devastates lives, fractures communities, and stalls development.

“Statistics paint a horrifying picture of the social and health consequences of violence against women. For women aged 15 to 44 years, violence is a major cause of death and disability. In a 1994 study based on World Bank data about ten selected risk factors facing women in this age group, rape and domestic violence rated higher than cancer, motor vehicle accidents, war and malaria.”²⁰

The LWF action plan *Churches Say “No” to Violence against Women*²¹ describes the many manifestations of violence and ways to address them through a faith perspective. It recounts the immensity of the problem, and the need

¹⁹ “Gender inequalities and HIV,” (Geneva: World Health Organization: Gender, women and health), www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/

²⁰ “Facts & Figures on VAW” (United Nations Development Fund for Women, Violence against Women), www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php

²¹ www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DMD/DMD-WICAS_Resources.html (2002).

for churches and agencies to persist in reducing violence. Again, gender studies provide good background learning for the reasons of violence and ways to reduce it. The LWF also has been in the forefront in internationalizing the issues of the Dalits—the millions of oppressed people considered as outcasts and denigrated in society. Within that framework, through gender analysis, the triple oppression of Dalit women—because they are poorer, outcast, and exploited—needs to find articulation and be addressed.

Persisting Disparities

Culture varies from country to country and race to race, and plays a significant role in fixing gender disparities. For example, many women in India are still devalued and therefore are expected to pay dowry when they get married whereas, in Africa, women’s work is valued and is therefore bought and possessed by the bridegroom by paying the bride-price to her father. In community-oriented societies, women’s roles are further controlled and perpetuated with social sanctions, ostracism, ridicule, and in some instances, maintained through “honor killing.” Both men and women fear, and succumb to these social conditionings, which then become community norms.

In a patriarchal social order, women, their bodies, and nurturing capabilities are held responsible for limiting women to the domestic sphere and subsequently to their subordinate status in society. Often, such domestic roles are explained as culturally appropriate. Women assimilate this system and even get offended if alternate possibilities are suggested. They consider that such possibilities upset the very fabric of culture and society. As they often perceive themselves as guardians of their culture, some women work against other women’s well-being if they perceive that they are not behaving in culturally prescribed ways. Such anti-women behavior is often pointed out in gender discussions by men, and by some women, who say that, “women are their worst enemies.” It is better to see such women as victims of the patriarchal system, who are socially and culturally

conditioned to think that it is the right thing to do, rather than as victimizers of women.

Nevertheless, there is a commonality that unites women the world over. They often suffer, in most societies, from the burden of playing multiple roles as producers, reproducers, caregivers, and nurturers. When they go out to organized work, they are expected to compete and work on a par with men, but when they go home many are still expected to sustain their traditional roles as nurturers, caregivers, home-makers and primary educators. Exceptions to this can be found in most of the Nordic countries as well as in some countries in the West and South where certain sections of men and women have adapted well to complement and support each other with household responsibilities. Such complementarity between men and women was not automatic but attained through a process of gender learning and legislation.

Women not only have multiple roles, but also have to play different psychological roles: as equals in the workplace and as subordinates at home. Many experience internal conflict with these different role expectations and either aspire to become superwomen at work at the cost of family and home, or give primacy to the familial role, to the disadvantage of their career advancement. Whichever of these two options they prefer, they are made to feel and carry guilt for not being the best possible mothers and caregivers at home, for bringing home-care distractions to work, or for not being able to rise to the level of competence anticipated of them. If they do not play traditional roles, there is often conflict at home as the husband or partner feels slighted. In some instances, such a feeling might escalate into physical and psychological violence. If women remain as homemakers, they are often downgraded and made to feel inferior by their partners as such a role is not quantified as paid work.

Despite coming from traditional backgrounds, some men and women have transcended gender barriers and manage their professional and personal lives in complementarity. Men are not ashamed to say that they change diapers, cook, clean, or stay at home to take care of their children. Women are becoming less inhibited about

excelling in professional lives. This has liberated both men and women to fulfill their dreams and realize their potential, as well as to respect the dreams and aspirations of their partners.

Today, almost half of the world's 200 million migrants are women. "While women are sometimes pushed into leaving their home country by profound gender inequality and feminized poverty, the process of migration is potentially an empowering experience that may allow women to seize new opportunities if they are labor-oriented. Unfortunately, human rights violations in various forms such as trafficking in women or different types of exploitation often run parallel to women's migration. Local and supposedly 'traditional' forms of violence against women, such as female genital mutilation or forced marriages, globalize as well, moving along with their potential victims."²² In addition many of them are undocumented, which makes them fearful and vulnerable, and therefore unable to access services and justice in case of exploitation or violence.

Feminist movements in the last century have enabled us to understand the extent of women's oppression, and have helped promote women's solidarity networks across boundaries, even though they have also led to separatism or polarization between women and men. Some men are extremely supportive. A few are undecided, while others accept apathetically or ridicule such initiatives. In this context, gender analysis could be a negotiation tool to encourage an understanding of women's subordination, oppression, and exploitation, recognizing women and men in relation to each other in society, and how they could work together for inclusivity and complementarity.

Gender analysis, therefore, should involve the political, economic, social, cultural and religious contexts manifested in institutions where women and men play a part—government, family, community, society, or religious institutions. This is

²² UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour; Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Yakin Ertürk, and Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, Jorge Bustamante. "International Day on the Elimination of Violence against Women," joint press statement, 25 November 2008.

an opportunity to understand the disparities and find ways to transform and overcome them.

Gender Challenges to Churches

Reclaiming gender equality becomes even more challenging for faith-based organizations to accompany women and men in the process of reclaiming their image of God. Specifically, Christian tradition with its roots in the Hebrew and Greco-Roman worlds has been faulted as a source of cultural practices that have made women and nature inferior. Christianity as a religion has also been accused of triumphalist colonization and subjugation of the more egalitarian and indigenous communities, trivialization of their more nature friendly subsistent existence, erasure of their cultural diversities as paganism, and their knowledge and wisdom as outdated and superstitious.

Christianity is also criticized as the faith that abetted globalization through a mission approach of rampant evangelization. The secularized Western world is still perceived as “Christian” by people of other faiths from other regions and is critiqued for following an economic model that has contributed to neo-colonization abetting new forms of enslavement through human trafficking and mass migration for work. However well-intentioned and sincere these mission efforts have been, they were based on an attitude of superiority, a Western model of development, and on an economic model with a linear outlook of unlimited progress, not as a cyclical model of actions consequently coming back to haunt us.

However, the Early Church period did try to promote that there should be no difference between Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female (Gal 3:28). “Indeed, women’s leadership in the primitive Church was exceptional not only by the standards of Judaism and the Greco-Roman world, but also by those of the later Christian Church.”²³ If so, we need to analyze how church structures have become hierarchical and patriar-

chal over the centuries and whether it is possible to reverse the trend.

More than 70 percent of active church participants are women who contribute in service, ministry, caregiving, nurturing, fund-raising, and sharing the varieties of gifts that sustain the church and its functions. If so, why is it hard for some men and women to accept women in leadership positions as bishops, presidents, and pastors? If women are expected to serve food and are respected for it at home, then why are they forbidden to serve at the Lord’s Table? Why is there a fear of feminization of the church, when women do not even make up one-third of clergy? A gender concept might well address such disparities. But not all are convinced. Some of the reservations against a gender perspective follow.

Fears about Gender Mainstreaming

The first fear is that gender is an off-shoot of the feminist movement, or a synthesis of feminism into institutionalized structures, and therefore is to be suspected. Feminism did enable women to charter new paths and roles, and provided options to develop their public and professional skills. By using these skills effectively, women were able to break boundaries, pioneer new paths or enter new spaces, and encourage collectivism. But the inroads feminists have made were often seen as subversive, crossing the line or breaking barriers, and are still seen as a threatening proposition against the established order.

Some feminists fear gender mainstreaming as a “soft approach.” They fear that a gender approach might lead to integration and institutionalization of the women’s movement that would lead to invisibility of women’s concerns rather than their transformation. There is a fear that gender mainstreaming also might be an attempt to integrate women’s work to cut costs and downsize staff. The critical voices of wise women outside current structures may go unheard in any engendering effort. Almost all feminist researchers are women, so the voice of men and their active involvement are limited in discourse on gender. Discernment in understanding of when it is

²³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Women in the Early Christian Movement”, in Carol P. Christ, Judith Plaskow (eds), *Womanspirit Rising, A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row), 1979, p. 22.

appropriate to put gender on the agenda separately, and when to integrate it, is a balancing act requiring considerable specialization, patience, deliberation, and concerted strategy.

Most often, even when gender is discussed, which is about men and women and the diversity and plurality of life, it is women's issues and concerns that become the main agenda, possibly deterring men as well as some women. So it is imperative to involve men and young people in order to effect lifestyle changes so that they might participate in the process of transformation. Women gained a lot of ground through organizing themselves into a global movement. Even though some solidarity networks already do exist, this is yet to happen for men.

Changing Realities

In some parts of the world, women and men have undergone a process of socialization where roles are imprecise. This has caused some women to compete and enter into what was traditionally held as a "male domain," such as that of chief executives, presidents, and bishops. This has made some men feel subordinated. Men and women can feel disoriented, with internal conflict about their respective roles. This can increase mutual suspicion, fear, doubt, and insecurity in both women and men if they are not open or adapted to such changes, and in some instances, could lead to a backlash on women.

In the past few decades, the concept of family has been the most affected. Although different kinds of families have existed in history, it is traditionally assumed that the family is the basic defining social unit. While older cultural practices such as polygamy, wife inheritance, dowry, extended family, and social control, are still exercised in some parts of the world, female-headed households, single homes due to divorce, migration, or choosing to live without men or without women, are on the increase. The traditional nuclear or extended family structure is giving way to cohabitation for heterosexual and homosexual partnerships. They adopt children or arrange for surrogate mothers to beget children through sperm donation. All of this has implications for gender understanding and behavior.

There is also a severe impact on children who have to cope with multiple parents, conflict of interests between parents, different homes, different instructions and lifestyles, as well as less clear role models to emulate.

Women, the poor, the differently abled, young people, children, and those on the periphery of any main agenda, policy, or action often are clubbed together as people needing concessions and favors. Though maintaining such concerns is important, it once again reduces women to a vulnerable status. Rarely are they seen as half of humankind with talents and resources vital to making churches and communities transformative and sustainable.

As a crosscutting theme, gender has become an integral component in developmental planning, execution, and evaluation around the world. It has, however, also become such everyday jargon that some use the term to be more politically correct, or even in seeking approval for their projects and endeavors, be they in the international development arena, among grassroots non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or church-run projects. A few of these "gender" users sometimes do not follow the plans they have put on paper. More often, such projects are designed by those men in leadership who still consider women as "vulnerable groups" or "beneficiaries." Such a persistent tendency restricts the possibilities and power of transformation that development could bring to any community by empowering women and providing a conducive climate for them to become responsible actors.

There are others who compartmentalize gender as an "add on" component in development initiatives. They allot certain specific or restricted roles for women, essentially within their culturally acceptable spheres, or at subsistence level. Running training workshops in sewing, soap making, and kitchen gardening for women falls into such a category. Men are trained in information technology whereas women are trained in skills that only perpetuate a self-subsistent livelihood. This is a beginning to empowerment but never the end result.

Others use the term gender interchangeably when talking about women's issues and needs and how these could be adequately addressed through subsidiary sectors within development, such as forming women's cooperatives. More often,

people think they are talking about gender but actually are only discussing women’s needs and issues. This might deter some men who want to be counted in, who expect their needs to be expressed and their issues included in the discussion on gender. In some countries, the term gender has no equivalent terminology. So it is often difficult to grasp its many dimensions. Although gender ends up being used as a professional term among church-based NGOs, it is not effectively mainstreamed by some of them.

In some church circles, it is often understood that if they ordain a few women and have one or two women in leadership positions, they have attained gender justice. Similarly, in some ecumenical settings and events, if there are a few representations of women then that is also projected as gender justice. Gender is much more than just women’s participation, though it is the beginning of addressing the gender question. Churches and institutions most often stop at the beginning of the gender process—participation of women with a few leadership opportunities thrown in as tokenism. This creates a false impression of gender participation and a misconception of inclusive practices.

Going beyond questions as to whether women have equal leadership roles; equal space for self-expression; whether their concerns find a place and fair time for discussion and deliberation; whether men are evolving in gender consciousness and becoming gender supporters; and, whether there is a gender agenda in their planning, are not intentionally looked into. Above all in the churches, apportioning of funds to address women’s development, such as leadership and skills training, is usually not factored into the overall budget. More often, women are expected to raise funds for the churches in addition to raising funds for their own ministries. Any funding allocated to training of women and gender training is done mostly by church-based development agencies.

The fact that gender is larger than women’s issues, but at the same time is an excellent analytical tool to understand the disparities and effectively address them, is yet to be grasped and methodically applied in many churches. This creates a divide between the church and agency-based workers, who from their experience on the ground are convinced

that investing in women is integral to and a basic component of development. Having men on board as convinced partners and advocates of gender is a step in the right direction while formulating gender policies to provide a framework to sustain and ensure equality and fairness, and to transform personal and structural relations.

Setting the Concept of Gender in Broader Scope

It is important to recognize that gender is not a halfway meeting point for women and men to reduce gender discrimination and injustice. Neither is it a tool to maintain gender differences and work around problem areas for amicable and workable solutions. It should provide equal scope for addressing the concerns of men: their fear of losing their place in a patriarchal setting, their discontent and disconnection created through women’s advancement, and a male identity crisis through blurring of roles.

While deliberating on these masculine and feminine behavior trends, it should be kept in mind that the concept of gender should also broaden our discussions and scope beyond male and female settings to the broader pluralities and diversities among us. Gender is not only about including vulnerable people from the margins of society but about how we could build a totally new model of community that dignifies the diversity of identities. It anticipates a deep commitment on the part of men and women that is needed for transformed and transformative living.

The Concept of Gender as a Tool to Analyze Societal Gaps

In an increasingly fragmented and polarized world, globalization connects the powerful and rich across boundaries, and leaves out the poor. Dr Felix Wilfred remarks that “Economic absolutism is able to survive because it has created five *mayas* or illusions: the illusion of unity; the appearance of growth, cover-up programs; corporations of disruption; and fraudulent trade

through forced consensus.”²⁴ The poor are totally left out of this illusory power. The aggressive patterns and behavior of economy, trade, science and technology, militarism, dominance over nature, current concepts of management, all are marketed as the right road to freedom and prosperity for many. Western education and applications often are considered as superior and as real education compared with the informal, reflective, intuitive, and self-subsistent way of life that is predominant in several parts of the world. The same yardstick also is used to classify the world not within this pattern of economic growth as “least developed,” and others who embrace and incorporate such a model as the “developing world.”

Gender analysis shows there is a cultural component in defining aggressive or assertive behavior in the North as “masculine,” and in often devaluing the more passive, intuitive mode of life of the South as “feminine.” The challenge is to facilitate and hold discussion on this broader setting of gender, rather than on just male and female inequalities.

Men’s Involvement in the Promotion of Gender Equality

The need for gender concerns to be addressed by women and men has been clearly identified. In solidarity, some men around the world have already begun such transformative work. Jonah Gokova, who runs a “Men for Women” program remarks that: “Allowing prescribed roles and social expectations to govern male and female behavior limits men’s understanding of the issues and inhibits them from active involvement. Men should therefore welcome gender analysis as a tool that enables them to focus more on male behavior and attitudes and how these can change for the better. It is indeed possible for men to change. Taking more responsibility in ensuring that we respect and protect women’s rights is possible for men. Most men who are prepared to stand up to the challenge and take an active role in working

with women on issues of gender and the rights for women find themselves are often overwhelmed by a sense of isolation.”²⁵

According to Mr Gokova such sense of isolation of gender-sensitive men could be overcome in two ways: ²⁶

“1. Through individual men beginning to initiate discussions particularly among other men on their frustrations of patriarchal expectations. Some might be ridiculed now and then. Nevertheless, one will be surprised to discover that some men will want to be part of an initiative that is challenging a system that makes them behave like super human beings.

“2. When a collective of men like male pastors, theologians, developmental workers as a group commit themselves to form an action group around the issues of gender and women’s rights. It is time ‘that men move from excuses to action.’”

Men as Agents of Change for Gender Justice

It should be remembered that any proactive policies on gender, any move to include women’s ordination, and their advancement, could not have been brought about without the active collaboration and leadership of men. They continue to serve as agents of change in many corners of the world and challenge themselves and women to rise beyond limitations.

The first male intern to LWF/DMD-WICAS was a young theology student from Brazil in 2004, Nathan Krieger. He encountered questions from some LWF staff as to what he was doing at the women’s desk. It took him some time to learn to formulate his answer with strength of conviction: that it was perfectly alright for a man to be involved in gender work. When he informed inquisitive colleagues that he was carrying out a survey on “Positive Masculine Profiles” in the Latin Ameri-

²⁴ Philip L. Wickeri, Janice K. Wickeri, Damayanthi M.A. Niles, *Plurality, Power and Mission: Intercontextual Theological Explorations on the Role of Religion in the New Millennium* (London: The Council for World Mission, 2000), p. 52.

²⁵ Jonah Gokova, “Men for Women,” in *Connections* (Netherlands: Vrouwenberaad Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, March 1999), pp. 13-14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

can context, it baffled them further. Krieger defines positive masculine profiles as “models that show the efforts of men engaged in changing their thinking and behavior, alone or in groups, in an effort to bring in gender equality.”²⁷

Another example comes from a Lutheran women’s conference in Papua New Guinea: one of the key features of the conference was a Bible study called, “Jesus Liberates Women in PNG from Male-Dominated Cultures.”

While growing up, Pastor Michael, a seminary professor, watched his mother suffer in a polygamous marriage. His father, a “bigman” would forcibly take the pigs she raised so that he could enjoy high status in the community, beating her if necessary. When menstruating, women were—and still are in some places—secluded, and some believe that even the food they touch is contaminated so they are not allowed to cook meals. After the age of 13, Michael was discouraged from spending time with his mother. Because of a tradition called the “bride-price”—similar to a dowry—women cannot divorce their husbands because their family is expected to pay the money back. By paying for their wives, it encourages a culture where many men consider their wives a possession. Even though she was often beaten by her husband, his sister was unable to divorce because of the culture and eventually committed suicide.

This experience caused him to read the Bible searching for stories of woman’s liberation. At the conference he distributed a sixty-page book, written in Pidgin (the national language) and English that systematically unwraps the stories of women in the Bible to deliver a message of respect and encouragement for women’s leadership. It ends with a chapter: “Jesus’ Approach to the Samaritan Woman (and Others) Could Be a Model for PNG Men to Follow.” Some of the suggestions include: “PNG men should put aside their beliefs of gender-based concepts of clean and unclean; women ought to be given equal invitation and opportunity for leadership roles in the

church; women should be given equal theological education; women should be ordained.”²⁸

Byron Hurt, an award-winning documentary filmmaker and anti-sexist activist, entreats people through public speaking and lobbying through his Web site for gender justice and for reducing violence against women. He says: “Through my filmmaking, writing, and community outreach, I will continue to do all that I can to ally with women and educate as many non-abusive men as humanly possible. By raising our voices, men and women can use our influence to collectively send the message to other men that the abuse of women is not cool and should not go unchecked within our communities. If you have a mother, sister, daughter, grandmother, aunt, or female friend that you love and care about, then you should be an advocate for them and tune in to the issues that affect them daily. Men’s violence against women is one such issue that affects the women you love.”²⁹

In a world of rapid changes, people are searching for meaning in life, an emotional anchor and stability, and the assurance that they are not lost, and that they are not struggling alone with the diverse and increasing challenges. A faith-based gender approach could well address such a need. The local churches are well positioned to understand and respond to this need by providing self-worth, inclusivity, emotional anchorage, meaning, and a sense of purpose for all people through a gender approach. Unless the local church provides such help, it might lose its significance and perhaps some of its relevance in society.

Guiding Questions for Further Reflection

1. How much of gender differentiation and subordination of women is based on the Creation

²⁸ Emily Davila, “A Gospel of Gender Equality for Papua New Guinea,” (New York: Ecumenical Women at the United Nations), <http://ecumenicalwomen.org/2008/09/25/a-gospel-of-gender-equality-for-papua-new-guinea/#more-267> (September 2008).

²⁹ “Abuse Unchecked: A Husband Shoots Wife as a Community Watches,” <http://byronhurtblog.blogspot.com> (September 2009).

²⁷ Nathan Krieger, www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DMD/DMD-WICAS.html#Gender (2004).

stories in the Bible? Which of these two stories do you identify with more and why?

2. How are these assumptions reflected in the understanding of male and female roles and responsibilities in your church, family, and societal contexts?

Possible Plan of Action

- Name the negative gender learning that women and men have assimilated about each other and discuss ways to overcome it.
- Train and mentor young women and men to put inclusivity into practice.



CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON GENDER

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” 2 Cor 5:17 (NRSV)

In recent times, economic advancement has been used as the yardstick for measuring individual success or a country’s development. Economic advancement and the thirst for unlimited growth have not necessarily led to a creation of *shalom* communities. Neither have secularization, privatization, modernity, science and technology, or democracy, been able in a good way to address areas such as self-identity, longing to belong, sense of purpose, motivation, direction, or fulfillment. In short, they are not adequate to address the dimensions of an individual’s needs: body, mind, and soul. Numerous resources have been invested in, and energy spent on, reducing poverty, violence, and sickness, and enhancing education, local economies, and community organization. More and more laws are enacted to ensure equality and justice; unless they are stringently applied by all actors, they could remain no more than good intentions. Such proactive policies, together with all services for equality and justice, provide an enabling and viable environment, but behavioral change has to come from inside a person, not only from a conducive external environment.

Transformation is an outward expression of an inward faith. As a Christian faith-based global communion involved in promoting holistic and just communities, the challenge is to address the question of personal and collective transformation by providing the faith component. The communion needs to joyfully affirm the liberating role of religion, and yet strongly condemn oppressive practices and interpretations within religion. Only then can the added value of being a faith community be experienced and well established. In the past decades, several worthy attempts at

theologizing have served as correctives to the way each person should live out their faith in relation to others. Some of the following initiatives challenge traditional concepts.

Made in God’s Image

Of the two stories of creation, there is a tendency to lift up the second, which depicts a more dramatic picture of Eve being created out of the rib of Adam, and the fall of humankind because of Eve not only eating the forbidden fruit but giving it to Adam as well (Gen 2;3).

Faulty understanding comes from a patriarchal interpretation and emphasis given to this story of creation which perceives women as temptresses, inferior and subordinate beings, and as mere help-mates created for men. But the term “helper” in the biblical text used to ascribe women subservient status is the same Hebrew term *ēzer* (help and support) that is used to refer to God as much as eighty times in the Bible.

In medieval times (1157 AD), Peter Lombard had already made an interesting observation about Eve having been created out of the rib of Adam: “Moreover from these causes woman was made from man, not from any part of the man’s body, but she was formed from his side, so that there might be shown, that she was created in a partnership of love [*consortium dilectionis*], lest perchance, if she had been made from (his) head, she might seem to be preferred to man for (his) domination, or if from (his) feet, to be subjected (to him) for (his) service [*servitutem*]. Therefore because for man there was prepared neither a lady nor a handmade, but a companion [*socia*], she was to be produced neither from (his) head nor from (his) feet, but from (his) side, so that she might recognize [*cognoscere*] that she (was) to be placed alongside him, she whom he had

learned to recognize [*didicisset*] as the one taken from his side.”¹

To be human means to be male and female because that is how God had created us to be—different but equal. Together we are the image of God and together we are expected to reflect this image. “Another way the phrase was understood was that the “images” of the Gods were the physical representations of them, like the sun, or an animal, or a carved idol. This explains why we are not to make idols or physical images of God, because his image is present in humanity itself. This makes even more sense later, when God shows himself in creation, taking on the form of man in Christ – the very image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).”² The male and female relationship is to be modeled on the Trinitarian model where there is mutuality, equality, and partnership. So when women and men live in mutuality and partnership it will reflect a God-like relationship. Human beings are made both unique and different.

While reflecting on the theme “Made in the Image of God” in a leadership training workshop, a young woman said in wonder: “I was never told that I am equal to men in the sight of God. I have heard from secular voices about equality between women and men, but no one from the church has ever told me that I am made in the image of God!” She is not alone in this thinking. For centuries, women have suffered from what can be termed as “multiple negative image disorders”: as sinners, temptresses, weak vessels, as second class. On one hand, as descendants of Eve, women are collectively accused of being the cause for sin, and are told that they should therefore be firmly controlled by men. On the other, their sufferings sometimes are justified as being well deserved punishment for the original sin.

Although women have been faithful church-fillers, providers of service, fundraisers, mission

supporters, missionaries, and caregivers in multifarious church ministries, they have remained in the background because they have either been treated as subordinates or have internalized this notion. Women’s emphasis on rereading the Bible, therefore, is an excellent way forward not only to understand inequalities between human beings, but also to understand the damage done to the whole of creation through an anthropocentric and male-centric approach to creation. Gender analysis could help examine our fallen existence of separation and stratification due to sin, and would bring us closer to the God-like part of human existence that was declared by God as good.

Even though human beings have lost much of God’s likeness through sin, and wanton straying from God, we do bear the image of God enough to indicate what humans were like at the time of creation, and before the fall, and what we can again become in and through Christ. The Alexandrian Christians understood Genesis 1:26 as follows: that men and women were created in the “image” and “likeness” of God. The image was the God part of us that we have never lost even in our “fallen state,” while the “God-likeness” was the God-like part of human existence that we have yet to acquire. God’s intention for human beings is that they are to continue to reflect the goodness that God saw and declared at creation.

Such re-reading of creation stories helps us not only have a gender focus but also to ask the gender questions: “What is not good in our world?” “Why is it so?” “Who controls the resources?” “Who benefits?” “Who is at the bottom?” “Who are responsible for these disparities?” And, “How do we work together as men and women to overcome them?”

Claiming the Power to Re-Image

Feminist theologians have brought to attention the power to reclaim and re-image. Gender as a cross-cutting theme enables us to walk in God’s likeness, worthy as children of God and worthy of bearing the image of God. To quote an Indian saying: “*Yadha deva thatha bhaktha*”—the devotee is like the God he or she worships. We not only mirror

¹ Master Peter Lombard, Archbishop of Paris, *The Second Book of the Sentences*, Distinction 18, Chapter 2 www.franciscan-archive.org/lombardus/opera/l18-18.html

² Lois Tverberg, Bruce Okkema, *Listening to the Language of the Bible - Hearing it Through Jesus’ Ears* (Holland, USA): En-Gedi Resource Center Inc., 2004), p. 55.

God’s image but we have to embody God’s image through our speech and actions. Women say this in a simple but expressive way, “walk the talk.”

Women and men are given the shared privilege of responsibility for all of God’s creation as well as shared enjoyment of its resources. Such stewardship and enjoyment must ensure that creation continues to be found “good” as God had seen and declared it. If the whole of creation is groaning as in labor (Rom 8:22-23), it is due to human irresponsibility, which is also caused by incorrect interpretation, and application of the terms “dominion” and “subdue.” The result of this can be seen in the wounded earth and injured women’s bodies, as well as in human relations that lead to the exploitation of natural resources, women, and peoples. Such a perspective and practice—whereby women and nature are often equated and imagined as created for men’s enjoyment, to be subdued and subjected to their control—could be corrected through a rereading of the Bible.

Re-imagining includes the effort to liberate men from oppressive role expectations internalized through the socialization process, such as: boys don’t cry; men must always be strong and take control; and be bread-winners and decision-makers at all times. Such role expectations, whether self-imposed or expected from tradition, culture and society, are also burdensome for men. In such a context, highlighting new masculine models that are collaborative and consultative could be truly transformative and liberating for men, as well as women. Many men, particularly in the Western context, and those socialized into such a concept of equality, have embraced a model of shared responsibilities at home and in child-care that has liberated both men and women to enjoy all the gifts that they can offer at home and in society. Such non-threatening ways of living in solidarity with one another could hasten a more participatory and just society.

Transforming Stereotyped Images

Patriarchal interpretation of Scripture repeated from the pulpit can reinforce stereotyped images

of women. For example, Mother Mary is often depicted as a submissive, sacrificial, quiet, and contemplative, young woman. Rarely have pastors preached on her autonomy in decision-making to become the mother of the Son of God without consulting others, her courage to participate in God’s mission for salvation despite the obvious social ostracism that would follow, her faith and clear anticipation of the Messiah who would bring in God’s reign. Her song, “The Magnificat” (Lk 1:46-56) reflects her knowledge and discernment of the context, and anticipation of the justice and liberation for which people were longing. Luther’s comments on the song follow: “Now I do not know in all the Scriptures anything that so well serves such a purpose as this sacred hymn of the most blessed Mother of God, which ought indeed to be learned and kept in mind by all who would rule well and be helpful lords. Truly she sings in it most sweetly of the fear of God, what manner of lord He is, and especially what His dealings are with those of high and of low degree. Let another listen to his love singing a worldly ditty; this pure Virgin well deserves to be heard by a prince and lord, as she sings him her sacred, chaste and salutary song. It is a fine custom, too, that this canticle is sung in all the churches daily at vespers, and to a particular and appropriate setting that distinguishes it from the other chants.”³

Mary’s “yes” divided history, and for the past 2000 years has made salvation free to all who desire it. It continues to challenge women to heed God’s call for liberation and participation in God’s mission. A reinterpretation of her song—that God acts on the side of the oppressed—helped in the promotion of liberation theology in Latin America, once again unleashing the power of the Gospel.

Among the most important outcomes of the Reformation was that of making the Bible available to the common masses, and the significance of Luther’s firm stand “*Sola Scriptura*,” which is sometimes wrongly assumed to mean biblical literalism that forgets to distinguish between text and the reading of text in context. In such a situ-

³ *The Magnificat - Translated and Explained 1520-1*, www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_c5.htm

ation, women's reinterpretation of the Bible has made a world of difference to women, giving them the courage to challenge stereotypes, and claim their rightful place and leadership. It also provides new options for men to partner women and work for justice. If women's theologizing is considered a continuum of the tradition of reformation, this makes it possible, as re-formation, for churches to listen and be receptive to it.

Imaging God Beyond Gender

Women have tried to review and expand on the "male" image of God-self, by pointing to the feminine attributes and imageries for God in the Bible. By using inclusive language, making reference to core words in the original, exposing extracanonical texts to view, and delving into the mystical aspects of God, women have liberated the God image from a narrow and limited human understanding. God's image as "Sophia" is one such example: "The biblical depiction of Wisdom is itself consistently female, casting her as sister, mother, female beloved, chef and hostess, preacher, judge, liberator, establisher of justice, and a myriad of other female roles wherein she symbolizes transcendent power ordering and delighting in the world."⁴

"Rebecca Chopp's robust use of the term 'Word,' central to the Reformation tradition, limns yet another option. In classical theology the Word indeed denotes deity, and does so in its English translation without any immediately obvious connection to gender. This expression furthermore has the advantage of connoting the power to speak, which women are claiming and celebrating in the emancipatory discourses of feminist theology."⁵ Churches could explore the beauty and immensity of God's image viewed through the eyes and explorations of women.

Such insights make it no longer justifiable to use only male language for God that sometimes

evokes a mental image of God as an old white man with a long white beard who judges and punishes! In the context of women and children who undergo abuse and incest at the hands of men supposed to be their guardians and protectors, such a male image of God brings internal conflict, estrangement, and helplessness. They are blocked from accessing the valuable use of faith as a power to heal their victimization freeing them to move on as victors.

Re-reading and theologizing also has opened up insights into interfaith learning and living. One of the modern translations of the Lord's Prayer from the original Aramaic version reads, "O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos,"⁶ instead of "Our Father who art in heaven." This expansion gives us a fuller understanding of God as a parent and not as an authoritative male expecting absolute obedience and fear from his worshippers. This God embodies the nature of father and mother that not only gives "bread and insight" but encourages our prayers to, "loose the cords of mistake binding us, as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt." Such explorations magnify the immensity and awe-inspiring nature of God, and as God beyond gender.

Concept of the Kingdom of God as the In-Breaking Reign of God

A review of the concept of "kingdom of God" could encourage us into a new reality of being that before has been understood in a hierarchical way. Some theologians have tried to use alternative terms like the "in-breaking reign of God," "commonwealth of God," and "kin-dom of God," to blunt its hierarchical and imperialistic interpretation. A rethinking of kingdom of God is therefore important to ground us in the teachings of Jesus Christ. He began his ministry talking about the kingdom of God, which gave a radical and totally different understanding of self, of God, of others, and of contexts. The Kingdom of God gives us a

⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), p. 87.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 42.

⁶ *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990) p. 12.

framework, a “*Weltanschauung*”⁷ that every human needs in order to believe, belong and behave, giving people meaning, purpose, and self-worth. It is not a self-seeking and self-serving life that everyone is called to, but a purposeful one that all we are, and all we have comes from the graciousness of God.

This does not imply that a person has to live a sacrificial and deprived life devoid of pleasure and self-worth. The over-arching principle of the kingdom is that we love the Lord our God and we love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko says that, “Paul’s pastoral message to the Galatians challenges the way the kingdom of this world functions, and contradicts its culture and spirit with that of God’s kingdom in which ‘independence’ and ‘dependency’ are brought together into ‘interdependence.’”⁸

Jesus began his ministry by saying, “...strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). Since this central framework is broken, the world lies broken and people are hurt physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, economically, socially, and politically. If we get the center i.e. we belong to the kingdom of God right, the circumference i.e. our needs and expectations will take care of itself.⁹ The prayer that Jesus taught the disciples: “Your Kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10), helps reinforce the centrality of God’s kingdom as our first consideration and our first loyalty.

In the kingdom of God, it is God who takes the initiative through God’s graciousness, as creator, as savior, and as the one who empowers. Jesus “did not come to show us the way but to show himself as the Way.”¹⁰ In human economy, globalized and exclusive, it is survival of the fittest, the worthy, and

the best. God’s economy, on the other hand, is a caring economy of the marginalized and excluded. Widows, orphans, and outsiders, are at the center of reckoning. This caring extends to the caring of earth and animals that sets a limit to the use of the land and animals by observing the Sabbath, a day of rest declared for all of God’s creation for recuperation. In world economy, where everything is commodified, even caregiving and workaholism are considered as virtues.

Christ made himself poor and vulnerable, and came as the one who served and walked about doing good, and emptied himself on the cross to ensure life in abundance for all. Christ shares with all the power from on high, i.e., the Holy Spirit. In the political and economic spheres of society, leaders tend to think that “they should Lord it over all.” But Jesus said, “It will not be so among you...” (Mt 20:26). He subverted the popular concepts of the kingdom by announcing that, “The last shall be first and the first shall be last.” It is easier for a sex worker to enter the kingdom of God than for a rich person who has not shared his wealth with the poor. The law of God’s kingdom judges people on what they have done to those who are considered as the least (Mt 25:31-46). Since global data shows women are at the bottom from all viewpoints of economy, education, leadership, power, owning resources, or decision making, God surely will judge according to what has been done to them, who are the least counted; or, like the women in biblical times, not counted at all. More exploration of “kingdom of God” as the in-breaking reign of God and its implications can be found in the LWF mission document, *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment – An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission*.¹¹

Jesus’ Teaching – Empowering for Gender-Just Attitudes

Christ’s ministry clearly points out that in him all differences are overcome, whether gender, race, culture,

⁷ E. Stanley Jones, *The Way* (Tiruvalla: Suvartha Bhavan, 2000), p. 58.

⁸ *Lutheran World Information* #12/2008, www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OCS/LWI-2008-PDF/LWI-200812-EN-low.pdf

⁹ E. Stanley Jones, *The Way* (Tiruvalla: Suvartha Bhavan, 2000), p. 58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 58

¹¹ www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DMD/DMD-Publications.html (December 2004).

caste or class and all could be transformed to become the body of Christ. The cross that he chose to die on to save the world is a “poignant symbol of the “kenosis of patriarchy,” the self-emptying of male dominating power in favor of the new humanity of compassionate service and mutual empowerment.”¹²

Feminist theology has brought back to light Jesus’ empowering ministry among women. There are many examples of how Jesus understood, challenged, dialogued, and interacted with women, particularly those in distress. He called the bent-over woman, who had no significance in the sight of the world, “A daughter of Abraham.” Healing her was more important to him than keeping the Sabbath, a compassion that reached out to a woman who for a very long time had very limited possibilities (Lk 13:10-17). His healing of the woman with hemorrhages, who was culturally ostracized from the public sphere, was also a call to inclusivity that brought her back into the circle of belonging, giving her the space to witness publicly to her miraculous healing. He lifted up her spirit by commending her faith as that which had made her whole (Lk 8:40-48).

Jesus challenged women to reexamine stereotyped role expectations, by gently reminding Martha not to worry too much about household chores, and commended Mary for choosing to sit at his feet like a disciple. Without slighting Martha’s role, Jesus empowered and challenged her to break out of her confined and prescribed space and, like Mary, be included among the learners (Lk 10:38-42). Churches that frown on women studying theology have much to rethink and reinterpret such empowering encounters with Jesus.

Jesus’ longest recorded discourse was with the Samaritan woman on the edge of society as a woman, and as a Samaritan. Jesus’ unmasking of her past, and current life of living with a man who was not her husband, revealed the extent of her dissatisfaction with life, and the repeated search for fulfillment that was eluding her. Jesus’ disclosure as the Messiah was first made to this Samaritan woman who learnt through her interaction with

him what it means to be a disciple and to be included back into her own society. He understood her longing and revealed himself as the Living Water that could quench her thirst. There was no condemnation in his tone but a reaching out to a woman who lived on the margins of life (Jn 4:1-42). In today’s world, women who are bartered, traded, and made to migrate, are living in such gray life zones. Gender analysis can help identify the causes that make women victims, and yet continue to see them as offenders, consumers, or commodities, and can help us reach out to them just as Christ did.

Jesus’ treatment of the woman who was “caught in adultery” is another revelation of his justice and inclusiveness. Jesus neither looked at the woman who was the accused nor at the men who were accusing her, but stooped down to write on the ground. Then he spoke, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” By uttering such a sentence, Jesus brought to light the unfairness of the system that condemned women without a hearing, and condoned men without a trial. Nobody knows whether she was forced to go into such a life, whether she had to resort to this type of life for a living, whether she was seeking a sense of belonging to some man, or she was in love with the man, or whether she was used as bait to trap Jesus. Therefore, any judgment that she be stoned to death without her account being heard would have been an unjust trial. Jesus saw through the unfairness of her trial, and the condemnation that did not implicate the man involved. Jesus saved her as well as the situation. Jesus gave her the possibility of a new and sinless life by saying: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (Jn 8:2-11).

For the past 2000 years, churches through sermons have reiterated Jesus’ admonition to the woman, ‘Go and sin no more,’ thereby recondemning her for her sins. “But, rarely have sermons or ethical teachings been based on Jesus’ first judgment, ‘Neither do I condemn you.’”¹³ This one sentence liberates and empowers women caught in circumstances that condemn them, and gives them scope for reconstructing their lives.

¹² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), p. 151.

¹³ Rachel Conrad Wahlberg, *Jesus According to a Woman* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 20

Jesus’ dialogue, encounter, and experience, with Mary Magdalene is an example of how women, when they are made whole in body, mind, and spirit, can contribute to the life of the church. General opinion of Mary Magdalene is that she was a reformed prostitute. She is mentioned in all four Gospels, and several times there is a strong indication of her leadership role. Despite this, preachers mostly refer to her as a reformed sinner. The Bible only mentions that seven demons had been cast out from her, and does not mention her as a sinful woman. To assume that she had been sexually immoral is therefore highly speculative. Since she was mentioned as “demon-possessed,” she must have been a victim of demonic power and not its accomplice!

She appears, however, to be a well-to-do woman who followed Jesus and helped and supported him. She was cited as one of his disciples, and one among those who stood in solidarity with the suffering Jesus on the cross. Her love for him impelled her to go to the grave early in the morning to anoint his body with spices. There was no selfish expectation or ulterior motive in her action. It is no wonder Jesus made his resurrected appearance to her first and commissioned her to go and tell the disciples the good news of his resurrection. The theologian Augustine therefore called her the “Apostle to the apostles!” And yet, the church remembers her only as a sinful woman, and does not commend her devotion and faithfulness: a classic example of how power and acknowledgement can be denied to women even when they are faithful, selfless, and show remarkable courage and leadership.

Jesus also let women challenge him in his ministry. His mother’s urging of him to do something about the lack of wine at a wedding at Cana began Jesus’ miracle ministry. The persistence of the Syro-Phoenician woman who would not give up until Jesus healed her daughter, not only brought healing to her child but also a testimony of faith that Jesus had never before seen; and that Jesus was not only Messiah to the Israelites but to the Gentiles too!

In 1 Cor 15:3-8, the apostle Paul completely neglects to mention the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, or to the group of women of which she was part, after Jesus’ resurrection. While recording all the men, Paul neglected to

name the women, thereby erased the truth that is explicit in all Gospels that Jesus had first appeared to the women. To explain the manner in which women’s leadership initiatives are downgraded, marginalized, and rendered insignificant, women use the acronym “**EDIT**”: **E** - Erasure, **D** - Denial, **I** - Invisibility, and **T** - Tokenism, all effective methods of removing significance and power from women’s leadership.

The church owes its expansion to those courageous women who have witnessed, shared, and worked in different capacities to make a new community. If women are to claim their rightful place in church and society, they need to reclaim such foremothers’ stories of empowerment, and draw strength from the fact that if those women could achieve much during biblical times, when patriarchy was entrenched, today’s women could do a lot more in affirming their self-worth and offering their gifts of leadership. Above all, Christ’s empowering of women serves as the model that could be embodied by men in leadership and partnership that would help break the chains of oppressive cultures and norms.

Jesus’ radical actions often appalled his contemporaries, dumbfounded his critics, and flabbergasted his disciples. In a learning process since that time, the church has struggled to transcend culture, customs, and taboos, in order to follow the One who promised both men and women, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed!”

Guiding Questions for Further Reflection

1. Which of the Jesus stories of women’s empowerment touched you the most? Why?
2. Are there ways in which men today could emulate the empowering model of Christ in relation to women?

Possible Plan of Action

- Name fears about feminist theologians and ways to receive their contributions.

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- Jesus said, “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15): Discuss what attitudinal and behavioral changes in men could be built up

as commitment in relation to women, nature, and community.



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CHAPTER III

RE-VISIONING POWER: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

“For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” Jn 13:15.

“But God has so arranged the body, giving greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it”

1 Cor 12:24-27 (NRSV).

“Church and society may make progressive changes only to see oppression re-emerge in new, perhaps more subtle, forms. Each of us is racist, sexist, classist, and more, because we have been socialized into and participate in the human condition of inequitable power systems.”¹ These characteristics can be overtly or covertly exhibited in the exercise of power. It is therefore important to understand power from a Christian and a gender perspective. “Gender analysis necessarily involves an analysis of power in order to reveal the operation of power, reconstructing and reforming for the sake of transformation and justice. ... Power analysis includes examining policy, structure and organizational dynamics as well as processes of organizational change.”²

How Is Power Envisioned?

Sometimes power is seen as positive, but at other times it has negative connotations, especially in

¹ Norma Cook Everist, Craig L. Nesson, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 86.

² Priscilla Singh, *Engendering Theological Education for Transformation* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2002), p. 16.

churches and church-related organizations. Many leaders tend to swing between the extremes of being “humble servants” to being excessively authoritative and controlling in positions of power. But these are not the only two options left when power and authority are exercised. There is no need to fear, denounce, renounce nor misuse power.

“...the hermeneutics of suspicion must be set alongside a hermeneutics of trust, as God reaches out to us from beyond our contexts in joy and generosity through the power of the cross. The incarnation and the cross should be at the heart of any understanding of power.”³ “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18).

Transformative Power

Power can be viewed positively. The power of the cross can transform an insensitive and self-absorbed person into a child of God with expanded vision to serve and care. The power of the cross confronts an arrogant person with the realization that what he or she has is because of what was accomplished on the cross, not because of his or her own works, and makes them humble and willing to serve others. The power of the cross can help victims overcome victimization and become victors in life. It can inspire the oppressed to affirm their selfhood and work toward their liberation. The power of the cross gives us power to love our enemies. In turn, such transformation leads to the power of belonging and self-worth, the power to

³ Philip L. Wickeri, Janice K. Wickeri, Damayanthi M.A. Niles, *Plurality, Power and Mission: Intercontextual Theological Explorations on the Role of Religion in the New Millennium* (London: The Council for World Mission, 2000), p. 16.

share and enable, and the power to effect positive changes in and around us. This kind of positive power could be called “transformative power.” It relies on God and the power that comes from God; it uses the principles of the kingdom of God/in-breaking reign of God and is willing to offer our gifts in loving service. Transformative power is infinite, bringing joy and enthusiasm as it looks to the well-being of all. Transformative power shares and expands as it infuses others with power and multiplies. It does not rely on external sources such as riches, hangers-on, or cliques, because the power comes from within and is constantly stoked by an intimate relationship with, and guidance from God, based in God’s Word and promises.

The apostle Peter was filled with such a power after being anointed by the Holy Spirit. When he went to the temple for prayer and saw a beggar at the gate, he said: “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk” (Acts 3:6), and the man jumped up and walked. We do not need riches to gain such a power. In fact, a magician named Simon who became a Christian after seeing the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the disciples, and how they transmitted such power by the laying of hands, offered the disciples money to give him such a power so that when he laid hands, people could receive the Holy Spirit. Peter admonished him and asked him to repent and pray (Acts 8:18). Transformative power is shared when a person has neither ulterior motives nor puts a price on it.

Propped-Up Power

Power can be misunderstood, misappropriated, and negatively expressed. It is then manifested as oppressive, self-opinionated, self-promoting, self-perpetuating, non-consultative, aggressive, abusive, and even violent. This negative kind of power could be called “propped-up” power, because it relies on props such as riches and trappings of wealth, coteries, hangers-on, and bribes to attain or retain positions of authority. It relies on the dictates of the world and the current

concept of power as self-serving, self-preserving, and self-promoting. Propped-up power is finite and based on fear and distrust. It is insecure and therefore insulates itself and operates with a closed network of confidants, families, and “spongers.” It tends to accumulate more wealth and position in the belief that they are the source of power. It is paralyzed as opposed to being open and receptive to creative new ideas and new emerging leadership. Propped-up power also works with double standards. A person who operates with propped-up power often believes they are beyond the rule of law, while at the same time applying strict rules and regulations for the people he or she is expected to serve. Propped-up power causes a person to doubt and fear: “If you have more power, I will have less. ...but God’s unconditional love, new liberating life in Christ, and the power-filled Spirit transform our very concepts of power and partnership (see Galatians 3:21-29 and 5:1). There is a direct connection between justification and justice.”⁴ Justification is God’s power at work setting right and transforming all created relationships so that acts of justice and service become natural and innate in every being that reaches out to God.

An understanding of power from the perspective of the kingdom of God subverts and reorders oppressive and dominating notions of power. The apostle Paul shares such an experience: “When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Cor 2:1-5).

Some find it burdensome to live according to the teachings of Christ and to follow him faithfully. It is easier for them to compromise in life for the sake of peace, their well-being and security,

⁴ Norma Cook Everist, Craig L. Nesson, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 87.

since adaptability and being politically correct is considered a sign of intelligence. Luther’s reflection on the dilemma of being a sinner and a saint and calling Christians “simultaneously saint and sinner” provides the clue to graciously embrace the righteousness Jesus Christ offers through his saving grace. No one can become righteous because of what they do, but they are made righteous because of the finished work of Jesus Christ which has to be accessed through faith. “...since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his Grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...” (Rom 3:23-24). Then it can be confidently said, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

It is easier to check through Scripture for an understanding of what power is, and how it could be appropriated and dealt with, than to enumerate the many secular theories and principles offered by management studies. The Bible confronts us with facing and enduring the inconvenience of change, because it requires a review of some popular concepts of power and our own understanding of it from Scripture.

Power and Authority Come from and Belong to God

The psalmist expressed it as follows: “Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that Power belongs to God...” (Ps 62:11). The Bible informs us that “authorities and powers are made subject to God” (1 Pet 3:22). While giving instruction on how to face the Pharaoh who had set himself up with a God-like status, God asked Moses to say: “But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth” (Ex 9:16 NRSV). The New King James Version expresses it more emphatically, “But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”

If anyone is in a position of power and authority, it is best to be grounded in the knowledge that it is God who has given them that position of responsibility and the power that accompanies

it. So their decision making and actions should reflect and declare as much. Some leaders forget this fundamental principle and therefore fail in accountability and stewardship to God and to the people they serve, which in turn creates conflict, suspicion, and strife.

God Graciously Shares Power with Us

This does not mean that people are slaves to God who wants to reign supreme over all. God has graciously made humankind as partners by sharing God’s power in various ways. Those in positions of power and responsibility can derive their strength and security in the knowledge that God gives power and strength to God’s people to govern justly and with vision (Ps 68:35). The prophet Micah declares: “...I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (Mic 3:8).

Shared Power Is Enabling and Ennobling

God shared power with Christ Jesus who embodied and exemplified the right use of power and authority. Jesus had the authority on earth to forgive all sins, heal all sickness, and drive out demons. Jesus freely shared this power with his disciples: “Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness” (Mt 10:1). Training people, sharing power with them, and delegating responsibility to them is integral to administering power.

The power of God is an enabling power infused in those who trust God and diffused through them. It gives power to the excluded and marginalized to be recognized and reckoned with. Christ’s power is a restoring power that enables lepers, who were considered as untouchables and social outcasts, to be invited back to worship in the holy temple of God. It is an ever-expanding power that includes more and more people.

Apart from the twelve disciples, Jesus appointed seventy others with a promise of power and provision. All they needed to take was the good news and peace, which they had to pass on every time they entered a house. They returned with joy announcing that they were able to make even demons yield. Instead of feeling loss of power over his disciples' accomplishment, Jesus affirms their success and encourages them further saying, "See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you" (Lk 10:19).

Such transformative power does not seek to ally itself with systems and power structures that are authoritative or abusive but counters them at every instant, boldly, and prophetically. Jesus was the very model of such power when he confronted the Pharisees, scribes, and rulers, who compromised or exercised control over others.

Jesus Exemplifies the Power of God

Jesus embodied transformative power in his life and ministry. He used the power of the Word of God constantly quoting Scripture saying, "It is written." When Satan came to tempt him in the wilderness, he quoted Scripture to deny Satan any power. He prayed on every occasion renewing and refreshing himself with the power of God. His faith was unailing even when the facts around him showed a different reality; for instance, when he raised Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus, others could not even imagine such a thing was possible. Jesus operated in the power of God and for the purpose of bringing in the reign of God. So Jesus' talks had authority and power, and manifested astounding miracles that confounded the powerful Pharisees and Sadducees.

Power to Perceive Possibilities

Another aspect of power that Jesus exercised was to never give up on his disciples. Even after three years of being with Jesus, the disciples did not grasp the full vision and magnitude of his Mes-

siahship, nor fully understand his teaching on God's kingdom, because they had a preconceived notion and limited expectation of an earthly Messiah who would redeem Israel. In a very human way, some of these disciples tried to influence him into picking them for positions of power when he would reign as Messiah. Jesus had every right to be disappointed with their mediocrity, lack of grasp of his teaching, limited vision, and selfish ambitions. But he never gave up and continued to encourage and take them on as partners in mission. Even when Peter denied him, and all of them ran in fear at his crucifixion, Jesus meets them and says "fear not." Some of them went back to their old profession of fishing even after Jesus' resurrected appearances, but he sought them out and guided them into catching an abundance of fish that they had been unable to catch during an entire night of fishing. He prepared breakfast and a fire on the shore to minister to their tired, cold bodies. By offering such spiritual, physical, and economic provision and nourishment, Jesus removed their discouragement and guilt for running away from Jesus to safeguard their lives. With great love, Jesus reinstated them to the circle of belonging as disciples.

The love that Jesus showed is that of a parent who admires and eulogizes a child's accomplishments even if they are basic or simple, or not up to the mark. Such parental admiration affirms children and encourages them to do better. Jesus' accompanying power is a love that looks at what we can be rather than what we are at present, and impels us to excel in anything we do. "The way toward transformative sharing of power is to act in admiration even when we do not yet truly admire one another. There is some truth in that adage that we can act our way into a new way of being. We live as though we are already partners, because in Christ, we already are."⁵

The secular quest for power does not understand the self-emptying power of Christ Jesus. It becomes a stumbling block to those who do not understand why Jesus, the son of God, should

⁵ Norma Cook Everist, Craig L. Nesson, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 94.

renounce all glory and power to be born in a manger to a poor family. It is difficult for the world to comprehend why Jesus did not prove himself to be the son of God by using extraordinary powers, and instead chose to die on the cross, like a common criminal. Jesus chose the power to lay down his own life. He said, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” (Jn 10:18).

Jesus had to set a different model of power than was operating in society at that time to prove beyond doubt that the power of God does not rely on wealth, position, social standing, influence, control, and compromises. He shared with, enabled, and empowered the weak, and sought out the least, the lost, and the last. To show that power is not exhibited through riches, he was born poor. To show that power is not exercised through position and high placement, he was a mendicant preacher. To prove that power is not secured by moving in the “right” circles, he went around with sinners and tax collectors. To prove that power does not prevail in being exclusive, he was inclusive of women who had no public role in society, and befriended lepers, as well as sinners and tax collectors.

To show that leadership does not mean “lording it over others,” he became a foot-washing king, a servant leader. He said, “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15). His ministry disturbed the comfortable, and comforted the disturbed and marginalized. People in authority like the high priests, Pharisees, and scribes, who were knowledgeable, influential, and exhibited power, therefore were tested to their limits. Jesus held them accountable for their positions of power, influence over people, and legalistic and distorted interpretation of the Laws, as well as their vision and anticipation of the Messiah confined to their narrow setting of human reign and political manifestation.

Some think Jesus was able to live out such a model and simple life, performing subversive acts that questioned the authority of systems and power structures of the time, because Jesus was

the son of God. They conclude that such transforming power could not be accessed by ordinary mortals in a context where success and power are measured by how much a person earns and accumulates, how high an office is held and for how long, and how much influence a person holds over other powerful people, economically, socially, and politically. To each one, Jesus promises: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these...” (Jn 14:12).

Power and Leadership

Women are often reluctant to be included in power structures and hold leadership positions because they have not been trained to show authority and power, and feel uncomfortable acting in the same way as men who have been socialized and have learned through cultural formation how to be leaders. If a woman acts in a controlling way, it is said she is “acting like a man.” If she exercises her authority in gentle and sensitive ways, accommodating other’s needs, she is considered a weak leader. Experts in leadership remark that its future will depend on “sense-making” rather than “decision making.” Yet global power systems rely on strong decision making and assertive or even aggressive behavior. In this context, the church is called to portray a different leadership model: that of respectful listening, discernment, and accompaniment.

Accessing the Transforming Power of God

Luke 5:1-11 talks about the call to discipleship that Jesus made to Peter, James, and John. It was a call of trust in what they could become, in and through him, and to a vision beyond their previous experience: one of sufficiency and God’s provision beyond their deficiency and deprivation, one of bringing people to experience the kingdom of God that liberates and includes. E. Stanley Jones, a missionary to India in the twentieth century, explains how the power of God is at work in those

who believe: “God for us—God with us—God in us.” “God for us” is the divine intention of God as creator and our parent. “God with us” is the divine intervention of God in the person of Jesus Christ; and, “God in us” is the divine indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This Trinitarian principle of God is to be experienced and internalized if we are to access the power that transforms. There are two essentials for a transformed and transforming life: the kingdom perspective and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Power of the Holy Spirit as Helper and Guide

Churches confess the Triune God—Creator, Redeemer, and Empowerer—through creeds, liturgies, and in administering the sacraments. Churches believe the Scriptures when they talk of the power of the Holy Spirit that made the weak strong, the fearful bold, the sick healthy, in erasing human divisions, and bringing unity. Yet many churches are uncomfortable to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit continues today to operate through prophecies, signs, miracles, healing, and transformation, and that these can still happen through people. Some churches have the mental agreement but not the emotional acceptance. They know of the power but do not want to access such a power because it makes them uneasy. Furthermore, talking about the power of the Holy Spirit is ascribed to the Pentecostals and charismatic groups which, to most mainline churches, appear quite disorderly, too spontaneous, noisy, non-democratic, and at times spurious, even if such characterization is rooted in mutual prejudice. Occasionally, their performance does not match their high claims. Instead of being put off by such manifestations, it is best to look to Jesus’ life and teachings to be guided to a true understanding and accessing of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was not only led by the spirit in his ministry, he led the disciples to the Holy Spirit. After Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus spent forty days instructing them about the kingdom of God and the promise of the spirit, advising them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of

the Father, saying, “This...is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:4-5). Jesus further assured them, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The Book of Acts conveys how the Holy Spirit began working when the people were of one accord in prayer and supplication, women included. Peter, who had earlier denied Jesus because he was afraid of a servant woman, was emboldened to witness in public with the other disciples in broad daylight to a mass of people gathered in Jerusalem celebrating the fiftieth day, the day of Pentecost. He shared this power with others saying, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). It is true that there were many dissensions, divisions, and conflicts in early churches, but they happened not because the power of God ceased to work in their lives but because the centrality of relying and resting on God’s power was compromised by heretical teachings, power struggles, or when influenced by the economy of the world, its tempting cultural patterns, and models of power.

Some tend to believe that the anointing of the Holy Spirit was a special anointing given exclusively to the apostles as they had to go into the world to preach the Gospel and baptize believers, accompanying them with signs and wonders. But the Bible specifically mentions that the Holy Spirit is intended for all generations: “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39).

Holy Spirit as Leveler and Unifier

The Holy Spirit enables young and old, women and men, to work intergenerationally and inclusively by erasing all barriers of class, race, and gender, as foretold by the prophet Joel. “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your

daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28-29).

Jesus gave us the one baptism—the baptism of the spirit. In water baptism a person surrenders their sins, whereas in the baptism of the spirit the whole self is surrendered to the Holy Spirit and is placed at the disposal of the spirit which is liberating and empowering: “...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17b). The Holy Spirit helps erase deep-seated prejudices and divisions that cannot be humanly discarded, uniting everyone in fellowship, men, women, old, and young. The engendering Holy Spirit makes everything new, and enables us to transcend from natural being to spiritual being and to do extraordinary things that glorify God. The Holy Spirit enables us to move from the sphere of love of power to the realm of power to love.

The Bible tells us that when a person disbelieves, fears, belittles, or ridicules the work of the Holy Spirit, it is a sin of blasphemy which can never be forgiven. Jesus said, “Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come (Mt 12:32).

There are examples of both transformative and propped-up powers in the Bible. It could be asked whether such ancient models have any relevance for the fast-paced twenty-first century, with a totally different reality. But it is possible to learn from the biblical stories because they are human and eternal examples to reflect on, and learn from. People and their aspirations are the same since time immemorial. The following stories offer examples.

Sharing and Delegating Responsibilities

A story in Exodus 18 shows how to share and delegate responsibilities. Moses tried to single-handedly resolve conflict among the Israelites in exodus, and exhausted himself until his father-in-law Jethro advised him to delegate such tasks to others and systematically organize the hearing

of disputes by appointing overseers. Like Moses, some leaders still want to exercise their authority by involving themselves in every detail of the work of their church or organization. Such control can lead either to burnout with tasks inadequately done or unfinished, or to autocratic, angry behavior.

Enabling Leadership

The Book of Judges tells the story of Deborah, a prophetess, poetess, judge, and military leader, in Old Testament times. Such a combination of prophetic and political leadership could be found only among three other significant leaders in the Bible: Moses, Samuel, and David. Deborah was known as the “Mother of Israel,” because of her leadership in a battle against the Canaanites. She sent for Barak, son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and told him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, ‘Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.’” But Barak responded to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” This is a remarkable example of the extent of respect and trust a commander-in-chief of an army had in a woman’s leadership. The Bible records that the land had rest for forty years under such able and remarkable leadership of a woman (Judg 4-5).

Dorcas, also known as Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43), was the only woman specifically identified as a disciple in the New Testament. She was highly respected for her caring service. Despite her widowhood, she encouraged other widows to come together and be creatively engaged. This must have been a difficult proposition in biblical times, to find courage and the power to transcend the feeling of deprivation, of being an object of other’s pity, and become benefactor and mentor to many other women in similar situations. Such a victorious life comes through faith and a sense of purpose. There are many such Tabithas minis-

tering in word and deed in churches and society. They need to be named and honored as much as the male models of leadership in the Bible.

Conciliatory Leadership

David was anointed by the prophet Samuel to succeed Saul as king of Israel. This and his eventual fame made Saul so angry that he sought to kill David after Samuel's death. David flees from Saul with six hundred of his followers to take refuge in the wilderness. He had to feed these six hundred men daily in difficult terrain, as well as maintain their morale. Despite such a challenge, at no time did David misuse his might to forcefully take sheep from the shepherds in the wilderness, and instead offered them protection. So David felt justified at the time of the sheep-shearing festival to ask Nabal, a wealthy man, for some food. Nabal not only denied David's simple request but made derogatory remarks about him. When David came to hear of this humiliation, he swore to kill Nabal's entire household and immediately set off with four hundred of his men. Nabal's servants quickly shared this disastrous news with Abigail, the beautiful wife of Nabal. She straightaway gathered the required food and quickly dispatched it by way of her servants, hastening to meet David to pacify his resolve to destroy the whole household.

Abigail dared to ignore her foolish and arrogant husband, and listened to the concern of her discerning servants, who had provided an early warning system. She wisely identified the root cause of the conflict: the need for sumptuous food for David's followers at festival time, and met that need. She discerned that the basic needs of desperate people should be met before taking up dialogue with them. When she met David, Abigail gently reminded him of his high calling, his worthiness before God, God's providence in his life, and that he had been chosen as king, all of which would be tarnished by any bloodshed. She used the power of suggestion and possibility of what he could become, leading him beyond the point of conflict to the prospect of becoming king assured by God through the prophet Samuel.

Women's power of negotiation in defusing conflict and promoting peace needs to be used more. Rarely can they be found among delegations brokering peace or at peace negotiation tables. Women particularly need to be involved. They are the most victimized as a result of violence and conflict. In the year 2000, in a petition to the UN, women demanded the following, to:

1. "include women in peace negotiations as decision-makers
2. put women at the heart of reconstruction and reconciliation
3. strengthen the protection and representation of refugee and displaced women
4. end impunity for crimes committed against women and ensure redress
5. give women and women's organizations the support and resources they need to build peace."⁶

Shared Leadership

A notable wife and husband leadership team exists in the New Testament (Acts 18:24-28, Rom 16:3-5 and 1 Cor 16:19). Priscilla and Aquila had been forced to leave Rome like many other Jews of their time, and later were uprooted to Ephesus, and then to live in Corinth. They lived in unknown places and in uncertain circumstances. Yet the couple depicts a picture of faithfulness and discipleship, a model of how men and women can work together in partnership under all circumstances. They hosted a "house" church and served as theological teachers to people like Apollos who was a great orator. They proved to be resourceful and faithful, an asset to their new community. Their leadership is an example of how power can be shared non-threateningly and mutually. It is

⁶ "Women Building Peace: From the Village Council to the Negotiating Table," a petition made to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, www.womenaction.org/global/peacebuilding.html (2000).

no wonder that Paul commended Priscilla and Aquila as “fellow workers” who risked their lives for him. In addition, they helped initiate a community that was open to gentiles, so much so that Paul wrote, “All the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.”

Partnership means inclusiveness not only of men and women, but of all peoples. An analysis of canonical and extracanonical texts proves that the early Christian movement aimed to be egalitarian and countercultural, where members were not defined by gender roles but by their faith. The early Christians understood themselves as freed by the Holy Spirit into a new, egalitarian discipleship. Women therefore were able to play significant roles in founding and promoting house churches and by becoming deacons and catechists. They were ordained in the early churches, complete with the episcopal laying on of hands. Paul explicitly mentions them as co-workers, contenders, and saints, who worked hard for the Lord.

It is important, however, to also recognize the difficult writings of Paul and Peter specifying restrictive rules over them. These often have been quoted to define restrictive roles for women, and to deny them ordination. They have to be analyzed in the particular context of their letters specifically addressing local issues, their own socialization in a patriarchal culture, and their primary concern to maintain a certain kind of order which they believed was right.

“His”tory is often a record of what women were successfully stopped from doing or how women’s roles were given subordinate status. Phoebe is mentioned with two titles: *diakonos* and *prostasis*. Exegetes have downplayed the significance of these titles when they were mentioned in relation to women. Whenever Paul uses the title *diakonos* for himself or for any other male, scholars translated it as minister or missionary, whereas in Phoebe’s case they translated it as deaconess, which has more to do with service. But the terms used in the New Testament context, and in other secular sources, refer to it as a function of teaching and preaching.

Similarly, the term *prostasis* was translated as “helper” or patroness even though in the literature of that time it had the connotation of leading

officer, governor, or superintendent. It is to be noted that out of the thirty-six names mentioned in Romans, sixteen were women, testifying to women’s active missionary involvement. It was only when the church was established as a hierarchical structure, under the patronage of political leadership, that the church laid claim to an apostolic succession to justify the preeminence of men and the subordination of women.

Both men and women are involved in the perpetuation of patriarchy. We often hear men accusing women of oppressing other women, and mother-in-laws perpetuating the “in-law problems.” By accusing each other or prescribing how each should exercise their role and responsibility, both men and women take definite positions and either turn defensive or accusatory if another alternative is offered. If a gender-just community is to be promoted, men and women must decide to unlearn and relearn roles and responsibilities in order to break the chains of patriarchy.

Intergenerational Leadership

A community works well when it works intergenerationally. It is good to invest in the youth of the future but it is better to avail their giftedness and energy in the present. One such example we can find in Paul who invested in Timothy to be in leadership. We know of him mainly through Paul’s letters. Paul was his mentor, teacher, co-worker, predecessor, and confidant. In fact Paul’s final letter, as he faced death, was written to Timothy who was something of a trouble-shooter for Paul. Paul’s closeness to and admiration of Timothy are seen in Paul’s naming him as the co-sender at the beginning of six of his letters (2 Cor; Phil; Col; Thess 1,2; Philem). Timothy was not only the scribe of these Pauline letters but perhaps even influenced their content. It is evident that Paul trusted him so much that he entreated him to stay on in Ephesus, oversee its church, guide the church in its choice of bishop and elders, and maintain order there.

Is it possible to imagine young people entrusted with oversight of a church, and to guide the church in the choice of bishops and elders today?

Another important lesson for people in power is to learn when to retire graciously, without fear and acrimony. Nelson Mandela when offering eight principles on leadership succinctly said, “Quitting is leading too!”

Inclusivity

An Ethiopian eunuch, envoy and finance minister to Queen Candace, was the first African who converted to Christianity, and must have come from present-day Sudan. By Jewish tradition, a eunuch is not allowed into public services. In that restrictive context, God recruits Philip, one of the apostles, to pursue the Ethiopian while he is riding in a chariot, to personally announce Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and to include the eunuch into the body of Christ (Acts 8:26-39).

For those who harbor fear, suspicion, or phobia, and take definitive stands in relation to eunuchs, homosexuals, and transgendered people, this is a telling story of God’s infinite love that embraces each and everyone, and of God’s desire to be known to everyone who seeks God. The churches must lift up such stories to understand how inclusive God wants them to be when discussing gender issues. At the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, human sexuality was a key topic leading to very controversial discussions. But the LWF communion had the discipline not to allow the subject to be divisive, and called for continued discussions and a way forward, which resulted in “Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue on Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality.”⁷

Propped-Up Power Manifesting Violence

David the king is considered a favorite and remarkable biblical character. But he also experienced a difficult time as leader when he failed

in his role as king, and instead concentrated on fulfilling the lust he felt for Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, one of his soldiers.

Facts show that most often those who victimize women are not strangers but close associates of a family, or live in the same neighborhood. David qualified in both cases and fit the profile of a violator often described as a good human being, a God-fearing man with noble principles. Many violators have such a good reputation that if the victim names them as the violator, the first reaction is frequently: “It cannot be true! He is such a perfect gentleman!” The second profile of a potential violator is that they deviate from the norm. David’s role, as expected of a king in those days, was to be in the forefront of war. Instead, he arranged for his men to go to war while he remained in his palace. At a time when everyone prepared to go to bed after sunset, David rose from his bed to take a stroll on his roof—an indication of his indulgent life. Instead of looking away from the scene of a woman bathing, he entertained lustful thoughts, had Bathsheba brought to his palace, and slept with her.

It is true that “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Power not only corrupts those who have the power but also those around them. The men around David complied with whatever he demanded. Whether it is a question of survival or of fear or a need to please a powerful person, some subordinates overlook or accept such violence and even become colluders. One form of violence always begets another leading to cycles of violence which then become very hard to break. David’s lust led him to commit adultery and when he came to know that Bathsheba was with his child, he tried to cover it up, and eventually had Bathsheba’s husband Uriah killed.

The powerful most often have different sets of values for themselves, a double standard, and so did David. Nathan the prophet, without confronting David directly, subtly told the story of a poor shepherd who had just one little lamb that he loved but which a rich man, with many flocks of cattle, took away from him to slaughter for a visitor. Nathan had to narrate such a story to bring David to his senses, to repent for his

⁷ “Living in Communion in the World Today,” *LWF Documentation* No. 52/2007, (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation, 2007), p. 165.

killing of Uriah and his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. David proved he had a good sense of judgment and pronounced exactly what had to be done to the greedy rich man who had killed a poor man's lamb, but he never identified himself with the oppressor until Nathan said, “You are the man.”

“Those (...) surrounded by admirers and supporters often succumb to the illusion that they are in control of their own destiny.”⁸ But this kind of propped-up power has its own limitations. David thought he had the power to commit adultery and cover it up “but “he could not control Bathsheba's pregnancy, Uriah's principles, or God's moral judgment.”⁹ Nor could he hide it from the man of God who came out and told him, “You are the man!” “In the eyes of God, the powerless are as valued as the powerful, and the exploitation of these powerless ones is evil.”¹⁰

The story (2 Sam 11:1-27; 12:1-24) is a reminder as to how, like the prophet Nathan, one should speak the truth, but in love, because the ultimate aim is to bring people to repentance and to the gracious presence of God. Only when people continually remember that churches are called to be prophetic, like Nathan, can they gather courage to speak the truth in the presence of powerful people. “Righteousness and sin exist side by side even within the covenant community.”¹¹ Therefore “we should always speak judgment in the hope that confession and repentance might make life possible in spite of the deathly powers unleashed by sin.”¹²

“A relational power is at the heart of who God is and what is gospel—restoring us to community with God and one another. A power that heals, overcomes all those demons that pit us against or separate us from each other. Power in which the

wellbeing of the other is enhanced.”¹³ We live in a stratified world where women, people of color, Dalits, Indigenous Peoples, and oppressed groups, live outside the circles of power. Global activism, and opportunities given by development agencies for education and developing skills, as well as legal provisions to claim human rights, have to a certain extent reordered this stratification and seclusion, and have enabled the marginalized, disadvantaged, and powerless, to have options to enter the circles of power. When the powerless assume power, it is important that they do not imitate the same oppressive power of which they have been victims, but that they demonstrate a model of power that is neither aggressive nor self-aggrandizing.

There is a re-ordering of power evidenced by men entering traditional women's spaces such as nurturing and caregiving. This might be a welcome change, but these spheres are still devalued as “women's spaces” with lower wages and lower recognition. Men who are able to enter such traditional women's spaces quickly end up assuming leadership positions. It is apparent in many of the projects run for women in member churches that a man, more often than not, still remains in control as the project holder or supervisor. Similarly, women are now entering managerial and other leadership and supervisory positions, which were often understood as being in the male domain. However, men have started to abdicate these spaces allowing them to become feminized.

“Just as women are learning how to not let themselves be ignored, trivialized, ridiculed, or eliminated, men who have seen new liberating ways of sharing power have an obligation for advocacy. They may be tempted or goaded to revert to patriarchal gamesmanship. But, freed in Christ from such internal or external threat, they can speak a prophetic word. Likewise women can

⁸ *The New Interpreter's Bible Vol. II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 1288.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1294

¹¹ *Ibid.* 1295

¹² *Ibid.* 1295

¹³ Karen Bloomquist, “What Kind of Power,” sermon, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Geneva, www.genevalutheran.ch/esc/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=127 (February 2009).

show appreciation for transformation they have seen in men.”¹⁴

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.” With the power Christ has promised, everyone is enabled to live righteously, fearlessly, and in companionship in non-threatening ways. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing the power of God released to transform lives that live in loving service to one another. Then the kingdom of God where everyone is counted and valued can become our reality.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Can churches be a place of equals? If not, why not? How can the church dismantle hierarchical behavior?

¹⁴ Norma Cook Everist, Craig L. Nesson, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 100.

2. Do men and women exercise their power differently? What are the subtle ways in which women and men are disadvantaged in relation to positions of power and opportunities for service?
3. How does the concept of the kingdom of God relate to and affect our concepts and exercise of power?

Possible Plan of Action

- Explore in discussion the constraints that women feel when they come into leadership, and the constraints men feel in relation to opportunities for service.
- Reflect on how we can facilitate an enabling power to be exercised and promoted.



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CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS OF BEING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNION

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” Rom 12:1-2.

The LWF communion signifies diversity. It is and should be an expression of unity in diversity because it has a unifying vision and mission. A general understanding that could guide the communion is that it intends to be:

1. God-centered, Christ-led, justified, and filled with the Holy Spirit;
2. mission-oriented and kingdom-of-God-principled people who listen to one another, learning and growing together to envision and re-vision an inclusive, participatory, and just society;
3. committed to accompany the least, the last, and the lost;
4. working toward sustainable livelihoods, and a holistic quality of life for all;
5. transparent, accountable, and other-minded;
6. intentionally inclusive not only in participation and leadership but also in defining and profiling inclusivity in its focus and substance.

To enable women and men to feel inclusive, gender needs to be an overarching theme that lies centrally to all that the communion thinks and does—be it mission, theology, diakonia, advocacy, reducing violence and poverty, HIV and AIDS, climate

change, economic globalization, diapraxis, or interfaith living. Addressing gender that is confined and consigned to women or to women’s desks and development initiatives, will not facilitate significant radical progress. Gender has to be internalized and deliberately used as a tool for analysis and action. There are four approaches: the practical, conceptual, strategic, and systemic.

1. A **practical approach** is one that continues to educate, empower, and enable women, since they are still by far the most disadvantaged group. This approach provides them with basic needs to become informed actors working toward transformation for themselves, their families, churches, and communities. Such a practical approach is maintained through the provision of scholarships and education, skills training, and opportunities that are women-specific and funds earmarked especially for them. It brings women together to collectively understand the nature of their status, and become aware of alternatives. Such initiatives will build self-esteem and develop a collaborative style of leadership among them.
2. A **conceptual approach** is one whereby gender becomes the analytical tool to understand and address the disparities between women and men in communities and churches. This approach would include a gathering of gender-disaggregated data, dialoguing with women and men, and ensuring that gender is included in any agenda through provision of adequate space, time, and a platform for discussion. Such a step would ensure that gender becomes a crosscutting theme. Those who are not in power would be given adequate space to voice their opinions, and those in power to also listen and learn, in a non-threatening way, to the hard and specific facts on how power, resources, and

decision making are disproportionately shared between men and women. This would develop an enabling climate that would make change possible. Investment should be made to bring all actors on board to understand and agree on common gender principles around which the programs and initiatives could be designed. Such a step is called gender mainstreaming.

3. A **strategic approach** is where pro-active policies on gender are formulated, and organizational structures are designed, to ensure that gender commitments are intentionally applied, systematically accounted for, and consciously monitored. This approach creates an enabling context that informs, impacts, and updates how the organization plans, articulates, and executes all its work. For example, the LWF has a policy of 50 percent participation of women and men. This policy cannot be seen as an option, but as a protocol applied by every representation of the LWF and its member churches to internal and outside events, both ecumenical and secular, as well as in every endeavor the LWF undertakes, be it development programs or church events.
4. A **systemic approach** is like joining dots to complete a picture. It makes gender an integral organizational culture that moves beyond individual intent or specified projects and programs left to specialized units. It becomes an ethos of the organization that builds on the gender interventions made and the learning experienced. It promotes a cycle of action, reflection, and events. Such organizational culture will then enable the organization to have gender as an institutional discipline, and an undisputed profile that says, “Here we stand.”

Gender should become a discussion starter in member churches to identify the status of women in church and society in local contexts, and how churches can empower them and be enabled to graciously receive all their gifts. At the same time, churches should encourage men by offering spaces for gender discussion and to plan how they could work in partnership with women without

feeling ashamed, apologetic, or fearful of losing power and control. The LWF Secretariat needs to accompany member churches in revisiting their constitutions, programs, and diverse ministries, to identify whether they have gender-specific, gender-blind, or gender-differentiated policies, and to help strategize in addressing these in a focused and sustained manner.

Some concrete steps to ensure gender learning and application could be:

Collect Gender-Disaggregated Data

This means that all data or information for women and men, boys and girls, is separately classified. This would help to determine the general conditions of women and men in every part of society, in terms of literacy rate, level of education, ownership of resources, employment, wage differences, dependency, house and landownership, loans and credit, debt, time spent on unpaid work, voluntary work, and caregiving that is not usually quantified.

With such sex-disaggregated data, it would be easy to identify the real and potential contributions of women and men, design programs that promote gender equality, and allocate the most effective and beneficial resources for both men and women to promote complementarity, and a better quality of life. Gender-disaggregated data is designed to recognize “the importance of valuing women’s unpaid work and of better understanding women’s contributions to national economies and knowledge generation.”¹

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is the process of addressing gender from the beginning to the end of any planned action. “It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design and imple-

¹ Gender, Science and Technology Gateway: Toolkit, Chapter 5 “Collecting Gender-Disaggregated Data: Case Studies and Models”, <http://gstgateway.wigsat.org/toolkit/ch5.html> (2008).

mentation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women can benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”²

In the twenty-first century, one sees the transformation of feminist movements into special interest groups that include movements for peace, interfaith living, HIV and AIDS, eco-feminism, climate change, economic globalization, human rights, and women’s theologizing. While these movements help to include the gender dimensions for each of these issues, the global wave of ecumenical or NGO movements is splintering to pet themes, or changing priorities. With such sectoral approaches, they tend to lose global connectivity, as well as cooperation among themselves. Gender mainstreaming, therefore, is necessary to sustain the gains that have been made, and to effect linkages to increase the impact of initiatives.

One way to overcome fear and resistance to using gender as a crosscutting theme, and as an agenda of both men and women, is to mainstream gender in all issues that the communion addresses. For example, when the LWF communion deliberates on diakonia, what women reflect and articulate on diakonia should be included in the reckoning. For women, “...koinonia and diakonia are part of an inseparable whole. ...Service which does not arise from spirituality runs a great risk of being functionalist and worse still self serving.” In Orthodox terminology, it is “the liturgy after the liturgy.”³

Agenda analysis of diakonia would lead us to understand the following:

- Offering and receiving such services are intended for both men and women, but service should be distinguished from servitude that is often required of women. Service is a free offer

women extend willingly, while servitude is a subjugating imposition on them by others.

- If diakonia is promoted over the existing development paradigms, one needs to look into whether gender as an analytical tool would be integral in diakonia as it has been for development.
- Most importantly, it should ensure that in diaconal deliberations, women are not once again relegated to being the traditional, humble service providers with less option to be actors and leaders, with less or no remuneration, and fewer opportunities for leadership and to be relegated once again to the traditional feminized areas of service.

Gender Audit

“A gender audit:

- considers whether internal practices and related support systems for gender mainstreaming are effective and reinforce each other and whether they are being followed;
- monitors and assesses the relative progress made in gender mainstreaming;
- establishes a baseline;
- identifies critical gaps and challenges;
- recommends ways of addressing them and suggests new and more effective strategies;
- documents good practices towards the achievement of gender equality.

Using this participatory self-assessment methodology, gender audits take into account objective data and staff perceptions of the achievement of gender equality in an organization in order to better understand concrete and unsubstantiated facts and interpretations.”⁴

Whenever an initiative is undertaken, there has to be an inbuilt gender audit to ensure that women benefit equally and become active participants

² Women Watch, Information and Resources on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, Directory of UN Resources on Gender and Women’s Issues, www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/gender_mainstreaming_10314.htm

³ Myra Blyth, Wendy S. Robins, *No Boundaries to Compassion? An exploration of women, gender and diakonia* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998), www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/regional/compas.html

⁴ *A Manual for Gender Audit Facilitators: The ILO Participatory Gender Audit Methodology* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2007), p. 11.

in the process. Gender audits require sustained political will from the senior staff of any institution. Without such organizational commitment, resistance, and gender blindness, dominant and adverse cultural conditioning could easily prevent staff from allocating the time and resources required to complete the different audit components. Often, only external projects have been assessed by this method, not the organizations and churches that are involved in running the programs and projects. This lacuna needs to be filled by a gender audit of the organization itself.

It would be useful to have a participatory self-assessment questionnaire within the organization which could then be handed over to a gender focus group to process and chart a further plan of action. The questionnaire should be designed to assess the staff's range of understanding of gender, their attitudes, individual perception, and behavior.

But gender auditing is time-consuming and depends on acceptance among all member churches globally. However, a gender audit within the LWF Secretariat to check how far the LWF has "walked the talk," is feasible.

Engendering the Rights-Based Approach

Many organizations focus on promoting a rights-based approach. Emphasis on the human rights of individuals gives a better base and platform for negotiation. Although a number of countries have formulated legal rights for women, this has not been matched by deliberate application that would lead to an improvement in the quality of life. At the same time, there has been a global shift in consensus over the role of the state in welfare provision. Public services have been down-sized and reallocation of services is increasingly assigned to commercial interests, charitable groups, and NGOs. This development, on the one hand, emphasizes a participatory approach that gives voice to the marginalized and poor in the process of development, planning, and decision making. On the other, "a disabling macroeconomic environment makes the substantiation of rights very difficult. ...As the state devolves responsibility for

welfare delivery to non-state actors, there is a danger of even further reliance on women to perform low-paid or unpaid care work as NGO workers and members of families and communities."⁵ Women who have been traditionally responsible for the well-being of their families as caregivers have to pick up where the state leaves off.

A shift in focus on the part of NGOs to invest in women, in order to develop micro-economic policies that favor women's role in production is because women are considered better performers and more credit-worthy. This can accentuate gender division of labor as women make up a significant proportion of those engaged in unregulated income-generating activities. Their dependency on NGOs makes them hold a secondary societal position as recipients. When the NGOs withdraw, as they should after the duration of the project, it is often difficult to maintain and sustain an interest in gender issues. In such a context, the question to ask is where the rights of citizens are, and in what sense women's rights are ensured in the emerging models of social service delivery.

Human rights mechanisms currently in place cannot deal with the stronger elements of religion, culture, and tradition, under which guise some key actors refuse or fail to comply with human rights standards. It is, therefore, crucial that faith-based organizations come up with gender as an analytical tool that cuts through all areas that a human rights approach is unable to touch. It is both a challenge to, and necessary that faith-based organizations and churches adopt transparent policies and commitments of accountability along international lines, such as the code of conduct regarding abuse of power and sexual exploitation, and mechanisms of complaint.

Gender analysis in any development agency is done mainly to understand the context of any project. "Women's lives are larger than the projects and they cannot be seen in fragments. Areas like religion, culture, sexuality, violence i.e. areas where patriarchy is strongest, are completely left

⁵ "Gender Justice, Development and Rights: Sustaining Rights in a Disabling Environment" (New York: UN Research Institute for Social Development, June 2000), p. 2.

out of these modules.”⁶ These are problem areas considered best left alone. To faith-based organizations such as the LWF, this is a challenge.

Investing in women alone is not enough. It has to be combined with empowerment that would challenge and counter patriarchy at all levels. For example, an organization might concentrate on educating and training women and girls but unless they have the power to exercise their knowledge, and have control over their income, women are not empowered. Unless men can accept their leadership roles and allow them some autonomy over their earnings, women will still be disadvantaged. It is a question of power, about who has access and who has control. A view of NGOs from the South is that gender guidelines from the North tend to ignore the whole question of power in gender relations, and that gender is depoliticized with the understanding that one should not interfere with local cultures. So the effectiveness of social transformation becomes limited.

Gender mainstreaming signifies political reorganization and policy enactments as, most often, the existing structures do not allow for gender equality. Analysis of local socio-cultural, religious and political situations is therefore a crucial prerequisite. Culture and tradition can definitely be used to resist change. The need to distinguish ignorance from unwillingness is also important.

Increasing the Visibility and Leadership of Women

The LWF communion has the most number of women bishops, regional bishops, and presidents with oversight responsibilities, and yet, about 25 percent of member churches still do not ordain women for diverse reasons. It is an ongoing diplomatic advocacy of the LWF to entreat and encourage churches to invest in theological education for women and their ordination. But it should be borne in mind that ordained ministry is one of

many callings; to concentrate only on that to the exclusion of other ministries would exclude and alienate laypeople from taking up various leadership roles. Such a fixation on ordination would not subscribe either to the doctrinal understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

When women attending the 1990 LWF Eighth Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, saw only male leaders seated at the podium, they collectively decided to stage a “walk-in” to the center of the hall while the assembly was in session. The walk-in was done with the prior consent and cooperation of the assembly organizers and leadership. The women demanded that women be seen in leadership positions too. This daring demonstration created at least 40 percent of participation to be reserved for women then and it has resulted today in 50 percent of participation reserved for women in LWF assemblies, 40 percent participation for women in scholarships for theological education, and 50 percent leadership in LWF decision-making bodies within which 10 percent allocated for young women. What women dared not do alone, they did collectively to make a difference. But it would not have been possible without the active participation and leadership of men who supported women’s demands and voted for them. This is a classic example of how the organization could evidence an inclusive communion where men and women work together in collaboration and respect.

Engendering Theological Education

In the last thirty years, the most prolific contribution to theology has come from women theologians and has impacted theological learning in many ways. Their contributions need to be mainstreamed and not relegated to either an optional or special course on feminist theology. In the past few years, the DMD-WICAS desk has concentrated on engendering theological education for two specific reasons: firstly, because engendering is inclusive. To be reformed and reformative, there is a need for dynamism and not the “status quo.” The organization therefore must

⁶ Kamla Bhasin, “Gender Trainings Endangered by Fragmented Thinking: A View from the South,” comment made at a workshop on gender and development, Germany, 1995, p. 3.

move beyond feminist perspectives. It is not only reformation of, but a transformation of theological education. The second and more vibrant meaning attached to the term “engender” is “to give birth” to something new. The aim is, therefore, not just to incorporate feminist perspectives into existing structured curricula, but to mobilize a reformulation of theological education, relevant and life-affirming, authentic, nurturing, and deeply spiritual.

Engendering Worship Services

Women theologians have been emphasizing the need to engender the lectionaries that provide cyclical scriptural texts that are read every Sunday, and during festivals, in churches. “Because church lectionary systems focus on the central actors and the major themes of the Bible, they deepen the silencing and increase the marginalizing of women that starts in the biblical text itself. Without access to these stories, however ambiguous, the church is poorer. We don’t have all the stories we need to make our lives, as individuals and as churches. And all of us, women and men, may begin to believe that women have always been silent in and marginal to the story of God’s relationship with people, and that the present and future can only either continue this pattern from the past or make a dramatic and wrenching break with it. To come to a clearer sense of our future as a church, we need all the stories we can gather, the painful and difficult ones as well as the beautiful and inspiring ones. Only when we have all the stories can we the church begin to see ourselves as a whole people.”⁷

Women have formulated many creative liturgies that not only touch minds but hearts, souls, and bodies, as well as the immediate context that makes worship relevant, participatory, and creative. They have a vast repertoire of mourning liturgies and thematic contemplative worship. Women transform worship to bring a closer

experience of God in our midst, not as a divine being sitting in heaven, distanced from daily toils. Such worship involves everyone present, not just the clergy and lay leaders. Such gifts should not be relegated to women’s services, but be embraced in churches to make intergenerational services more inclusive and authentic.

If the gender barrier is to be broken within a generation, it is important to concentrate on young people and children. A simple way to incorporate leadership and affirm everybody’s gifts is to ensure that worship in churches is led by an intergenerational team as often as possible. This would visibly express that the church worships and lives in inclusivity. Engendering theological education, revising our lectionaries, and bringing more life through authentic spiritual worship would strengthen and further a gender-just communion.

Persistent Advocacy and Collaborative Networking

The 1988-1998 “Ecumenical Decade of the Churches: in Solidarity with Women” was a movement of women and men that was persistent in emphasizing “the elimination of all violence in its various forms and asked the churches to declare that its presence in the church is an offence against God, humanity and the earth.”⁸ The LWF as a communion responded to this call and addressed the issue of violence through the action plan *Churches Say “No” to Violence against Women*.

In a similar manner, the LWF could work on a collective agenda, for example, that all member churches aim toward ordaining women within the next ten years, or put gender policies in place in their constitutions. In such thematic endeavors, it is possible for some churches to take the lead on an issue that then informs and encourages the others in the communion to avail their input and contextualize it according to their needs. For ex-

⁷ *Remembering the Women – Women’s Stories from Scripture for Sundays and Festivals*, ed. David Philippart, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications), p. viii.

⁸ “From Solidarity to Accountability.” Letter from the Decade Festival – Churches in Solidarity with Women” in *Together on the Way*, Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, ed. Diane Kessler (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999), p. 243.

ample, the DMD-WICAS regional coordinators took the lead in addressing the issue of violence, visited the women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to refer to their work, and called for a global consultation on “Breaking the Silence.” This prompted the regional coordinators in other continents to learn from their experience and collaborate with them. This is the gift and added value of being a communion.

Making Gender an Agenda of the Church

It is easier to understand and apply gender as a tool for analysis in secular development spheres but harder when it comes to church circles, which tend to be patriarchal and hierarchical. It is interesting to note that some church women from countries perceived as “advanced” in gender policies and practices showed less interest in continuing to focus on gender. It often is forgotten that these advancements have resulted from the long and arduous struggle of the women’s movement during decades, moving governments to make gender commitments. Although all church development agencies ensure a gender analysis and focus, it often is not the case within the member churches to which these projects and development agencies belong. Gender involves not only a change in individual attitude and behavior, but also in the churches’ organizational attitude and behavior, as well as in the faith-based institutions.

Gender Justice – Policies and Processes in the LWF

There have been admirable commitments and sustained efforts to be gender inclusive in the LWF (cf. *Appendixes I and II*). There is vast scope for the LWF to be further involved in the transformation process as an international and faith-based organization. Deconstructing the concept of patriarchy and the attendant dualism, androcentrism, and hierarchy, is a priority. An immediate move would be to encourage the men’s movement, and to question the male concept of

masculinity, as well as the pressure on them to sustain a “macho” image, and the violence to which that might lead.

A further measure could be the formulation of a gender policy for the LWF Secretariat. In order to streamline and render effective programs being planned, it is essential that WICAS design a process for facilitating, monitoring and evaluating gender equity in the Secretariat, and promoting gender equity in the LWF communion. It must have a mandate of oversight to monitor the many gender commitments made at assemblies to see that they are matched by good performance, and to profile the LWF as a gender-inclusive organization.

Gender perspective is a learned discipline. Gender is a call and reaffirmation to a discipleship of equals. So, in addition to discussions on the difficulties women or men face, or of training men and women to become gender-just, the communion must promote unified thinking and consideration of the LWF as part of the body of Christ: where everyone is important, each with a role to play in the reordering of life, and the resourcing of the fragile earth, to the fullness and goodness that God created it to be.

Empowerment, reconciliation, and transformation will happen when our hearts, minds, and emotions, are touched by the transforming power of Christ. “The risen Christ is not limited, as we are, by geography or time.”⁹ “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn 8:36). Free and included, a sign and expression of an inclusive communion.

⁹ Dr Ralph F. Wilson, “#109. Appearance on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35),” Jesus Walk Bible Study Series, www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/24_13-35.htm



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APPENDIX 1

A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE LWF AND GLOBAL PROCESSES ON GENDER

The LWF was formed after the Second World War. Development and alleviation of human suffering was at the heart of its formation. The LWF’s document on mission, *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*, points to “accompaniment” as a model and international diakonia as a core principle and defining ministry of the LWF. It is important, therefore, to trace the paradigm shifts in the understanding of development over sixty years, mostly in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable—women and children. Such an overview could help analyze the current development approach and use of gender analysis as a methodology for effective design and execution of development initiatives.

The International Context

With the declaration of the year 1975 by the UN as “International Women’s Year,” the focus on women’s development and the need to raise awareness about it gained global momentum. The 1975 UN First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City brought to light the varieties of issues women faced around the world, and the urgent need to address them systematically. This compelled the UN to declare a UN Decade for Women from 1976 to 1985. Realizing the potential of a blossoming women’s movement and its power to effect changes through collectivism, the UN continued to hold more World Conferences on Women, in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995). These have created important spaces for women to move the international development agenda from a narrow “add women and stir” approach to placing gender relations and women’s empowerment as critical and central to economic, social, and political development.

These world conferences linked the local to the global, the national to the international, and influenced the global community to become aware of, and

ultimately be accountable to women, who previously had been considered as targets and recipients of development rather than as subjects of development. The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) helped to focus on autonomy of the body and sexual and reproductive health as basic rights for all women. The Copenhagen conference made visible the gender bias in economics and labor patterns and the growing role of women in economic production. The Beijing conference went to the heart of the problems of current development macro and mal-development models. It emphasized the need to drastically change the world’s approach to progress, and identified women’s empowerment as critical and central to economic, social, and political development. It helped to develop a global consciousness and consensus that gender equality has to be an inalienable and integral focus of any human endeavor. Gender approach became obligatory in NGOs and international institutions, and accountability is anticipated from governments at the annual sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) processes.

The LWF, at its 1970 Fifth Assembly in Evian, France, saw the need to coordinate the current work of women in the LWF and authorized establishment of a desk for women in the Secretariat. The desk was formed two years later in 1972; a clear indication that the LWF was somewhat ahead of the global process in integrating space for the women’s movement and its concerns. Three phases are identifiable in the history of the women’s desk that are comparable to the three phases of global development strategies in relation to women’s empowerment.

Building the Base

The first phase was to establish among men and women the fact that women are made in the

image of God, that they have many gifts, and should have equal opportunities to share these gifts to enrich the church. The second phase was to make women, as well as the structures and leadership of the churches, conform to this fact, and open up ways for women to enter into the diverse ministries of the church. Networks of theological women and ordained women were formed. Much effort was made to give women training in leadership skills to be able to analyze, as well as articulate, their needs. Platforms were facilitated to communicate these needs, and to organize women through consultations and training nationally, regionally, and internationally.

Women, who did not have access to education and sustenance, were targeted through LWF development projects. This initiative is comparable to the concept of women's integration into development, popularly known as Women in Development (WID). This welfare-oriented development was inspired by the principles of charity and philanthropy. The approach perceived the problem in women's development to be mostly women themselves, and viewed them primarily within their roles as wives and mothers. Therefore many projects developed for women had sections of mother and child care, nutrition and health, and homes for the destitute, that set women in limited and stereotyped roles as welfare recipients.

The second approach to development was known as Women and Development (WAD), which believed that women play an important role not only in reproduction but also in the production of goods and services. So it promoted food-for-work programs, self-employment schemes, credit programs, community-based programs of health care, non-formal education, skills development, and formation of self-help groups. These were still only aimed at subsistence level. Although the first two approaches, WID and WAD, responded well to the needs of women, they tried to integrate women in development mostly as "objects" not as subjects of transformation.

Ecumenically, it was the time when dialogue between women and men was promoted through the World Council of Churches (WCC) to bring women and men together as part of the human family to discuss their issues and seek better understanding of one other. What was still missing

was an initiative in relation to a gender-based development strategy that would address the systemic cause of women's underdevelopment, and include them at every step of the development process, i.e., enable them to become "subjects" of change. Investing in women's education, health, and their access to resources became an integral part of the development strategy, although not as an end but as a beginning in the process of integrating them as equals into society.

With this development milieu came the second phase of the history of the LWF women's desk. It was renamed the desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) in the realization that women not only had vital and extensive roles to play in churches but also in society. This was the time when links were further strengthened with ecumenical women's organizations and other NGOs and UN-based women's networks and commissions such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women. This put WICAS in a visible role as one of the pioneering church women's movements, not only in shaping theologies, challenging structures, and empowering women in the churches, but also in mobilizing women into a movement that revisited policies on women together with the global women's movement. Through national and international bodies, women were encouraged to challenge structures that hampered and underutilized their resources, gifts, and calling.

If the 1995 Beijing UN Fourth World Conference on Women was the highlight of the second phase, the 1988–1998 WCC "Ecumenical Decade of the Churches: in Solidarity with Women" was the highlight of the ecumenical movement that sent out seventy-five teams worldwide to visit member churches to find the status of women and the churches' work on their behalf.

Within the LWF, a strong network of liaison persons from member churches was formed, as well as a network of consultants that later became a network of regional coordinators. This network became ears, eyes, and mouth on behalf of the LWF, and represented WICAS in all regions. In this way, the specific and diverse needs of the regions were heard, and programs were planned and executed by the regional coordinators and liaison persons in their regions and across continents. This phase could

be compared to the concept of WAD (Women and Development) in the field of development.

Envisioning Transformation

In the early nineties, proliferating women’s movements, both secular and faith-based, determined that the concepts of women in development (WID) and women and development (WAD) had not adequately addressed the basic fabric of society and culture, tradition and theologies that shape thinking and attitudes, therefore the behavior of people. This lacuna blunted the many initiatives undertaken in building a just society of equals. Even when education and employment opportunities for women were made available, they were not accessible for the majority. Many of the women fortunate enough to avail these facilities found that they had multiple roles. In addition, their productive, reproductive, and nurturing roles were very demanding. Accessing training in skills and education was easier than being accepted as skilled and educated women leaders.

Women had similar experiences in churches. They struggled to gain access to theological education. Many in the global South were able to benefit from theological training through LWF scholarships. But entering the ordained ministry was not automatic for them like it was for men. It took a long period of advocacy, strategic meetings, and projects, to attain the current level of about three-quarters of LWF member churches having ordained women. In some other churches, theologically trained women have been waiting and hoping to be ordained for more than twenty years. These women, because of their longing and commitment to serve God, completed their education against great odds with little encouragement either from their churches or their families because of having no future career option. Churches still found it difficult to include them in the ordained ministry or to honor their commitment to heed their call from God to serve in such a capacity. Reasons for this lack of welcome are:

- A re-emphasis on biblical literalism. For instance, the text: “...women should be silent

in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says” (1 Cor 14:34). Again, this text is quoted as a reason for not using women as pastors, or as lay preachers and leaders.

- Male-centered theology and practices: e.g., since Jesus Christ was male, God should be male. Christ the head of the church is male, the disciples were male, and therefore the apostolic succession is through male clergy.
- Persistent use of the male language of liturgies and the language for God.
- Women’s internalizing of the teaching that it was Eve, a woman, who brought sin, and that as women they are like Eve—temptresses, and therefore should be subordinated and kept under control.
- Old Testament talk of women’s impurity because of their reproductive function. This only reinforces similar cultural norms that still exist in some parts of the world.
- Negative local and patriarchal customs and traditions doubly reinforced by Jewish traditions described in the Bible.
- Persistence with old constitutions in need of revision, and double standards for men and women maintained by churches.
- Some unconvinced church leaders who act as gate-keepers, or fear a split in the church if ordination of women is carried out.
- Maintenance of a “glass ceiling” for women to retain power among men, and to restrict a few capable and charismatic women who are perceived as threats to male leadership.
- Inherited church tradition and fear of the breaking up of long held overseas partnerships with churches, or conservative mission boards that do not subscribe to the ordination of women.

- Less support from the traditional laywomen's movement within churches because lay women feel marginalized in relation to trained women theologians.
- A few churches that have ordained women in order to be politically correct in the global setting, or as a token, without continuing the practice.
- Perennial conflict within churches which set aside gender agenda as less important.
- Cultural impositions that subordinate women and deny them authority and decision-making power. Certain cultures also restrict women's mobility, and talking to men in public.
- A faulty perception that it is a Western imposition and feminist agenda.
- Fear of feminization of the church.

In some of the smaller and newer churches it is just a matter of time before a decision is taken to ordain women, depending on the willingness of leaders, finding financial resources to invest in women's theological education and for their employment, as well as offering the call to work in the churches.

A few women, frustrated with their restrictive roles, have left the church depriving themselves of the fellowship, support system, and worshiping community that the church offers despite its hierarchical and patriarchal flaws. These women have also deprived their families, and especially their children of Christian nurture, and are lost to the church. A small group of women founded "women's churches" to provide space for themselves. Some have passively accepted that it is impossible to change the system, while others still continue the struggle either within the church or by joining networks of NGO movements to work for transformation in families and societies. Some have managed to become leaders due to their hope, persistence, and charisma. Others try to formulate liturgies appropriate to their needs, and use poems, dances, and create different forms of liturgies to which they can relate. But these rich

and contextual resources are still used only within women's groups and are not mainstreamed.

Faced with this, women have still remained faithful to the church and struggled for change within it. Some have been rereading the Bible, reinterpreting texts and daringly and imaginatively exploring women's role in the Bible to reclaim their place. Some seminaries have initiated and included feminist theology or women's studies in their curriculum. Others have gone further and discussed gender studies. These are all empowering signs of hope that women see within the churches.

To transcend restrictions and boundaries that limit women from being part of an inclusive communion, not only does the LWF need to work more but needs to invest in men to develop gender consciousness. There is increasing number of women entering what were earlier perceived as "male bastions;" and a tendency among some men and women to consider this a threat to the order and peace of family, society, and the church. Some women also fear change. Most men too, because if they have to include women in their traditionally held domain, they will have to give up some of their roles, take on new and less significant ones, and share their power and authority.

This brings us to the third phase in the history of WICAS that parallels the global movement on gender and development (GAD). The coming together of women in and through the WICAS desk and similar global women's ecumenical movements has helped women forge bridges across borders and boundaries, languages and cultures, denominational differences, and class and race distinctions. Through these avenues, the voice of women increasingly has been heard regarding their concern not only for themselves and their families, their churches and societies, but for the whole of God's creation.

The global ecumenical women's movement urged the WCC to call for an "Ecumenical Decade of the Churches: in Solidarity with Women," from 1988 to 1998. The concluding festival, in Harare, Zimbabwe, highlighted the critical areas of concern that women requested the churches to address: the economic exclusion of millions of women; violence against women that tears the very fabric of our families, churches, and societies; and, racism and xenophobia that keep us divided

as threats to the very being of the church. The LWF followed up with an action plan document “*Churches Say “No” to Violence against Women.*” This has become the most translated, applied, and distributed LWF document in the sixty-odd years of LWF history. Within a three-year span, more than twenty-seven projects that either addressed violence against women, or gender education as a tool for reducing it, were formulated by member churches around the world, enabling them to set up crisis homes for women, open up ordination of women, and train pastors and leaders to address the issue.

There is a clear indication, through the commitments of LWF assemblies that there should be gender mainstreaming if the LWF is to achieve the goals and visions of being an inclusive communion. As an agenda for WICAS, and for the churches in the near future, gender mainstreaming was well established by the commitments made at recent LWF assemblies:

- “to actively examine, study and promote gender awareness as it impinges upon theology, education, economics, human sexuality (including sexual harassment, violence and abuse), power sharing in church and community, and family life;”¹
- “Instill gender awareness and make sure that gender is taken seriously in all projects to be developed by ensuring that they are considered and approved by a balanced gender group;”²
- “Challenge sexual stereotypes and raise gender issues early in the life of youth, seeking to build a just community of women and men.”³

From the late twentieth to the beginning of the twenty-first century, the WICAS desk has taken

initiatives to mainstream gender in theological education through consultations. WICAS has worked toward creating policies so that development projects are checked for a gender component in relation to the issues churches are addressing, whether women are involved in the designing, execution, and evaluation of projects, and whether there is a gender audit. In addition, the LWF Project Committee discussed a gender survey of church projects to find out what level of progress the LWF has made in relation to gender, and recommended making gender perspectives integral to the designing, execution, and evaluation of development projects.

LWF field programs have formulated comprehensive gender policies to guide their work. Regional workshops have been held to discuss “Gender and Power.” They were attended by women and men leaders, including youth, from church and development sectors worldwide. At the beginning of one, a church leader asked, “What more do women want, now that most of our member churches approve the ordination of women?” In the following days, gender-specific data on HIV and AIDS, poverty, and violence, supported with biblical explorations and Bible studies, enabled understanding of the immensity of the disparities between men and women. This caused the same church leader to ask, “Why didn’t you tell us?” Such is the possibility of transformation, when data on disparities between men and women is provided as facts, combined with hard evidence from the field, and the added voice of church women who experience gender bias. These programs of men, women and youth together need to be sustained to make change possible.

In addition to gender advocacy, the WICAS desk is focusing on gender mainstreaming and providing gender input to issues highlighted in the LWF in recent years—be they mission, HIV and AIDS, poverty, economic globalization, diakonia, climate change, or water—thereby adding components to engender the LWF. At the same time, WICAS continues to accompany women with practical needs, in sustaining leadership roles for them, and highlighting their needs and concerns.

A clear challenge remains to develop gender policies for the communion that bear better re-

¹ Report of the 1997 LWF Ninth Assembly, Hong Kong, p. 50.

² Report of the 1997 LWF Ninth Assembly, Hong Kong, p. 64.

³ Message from Village Group 2, 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, par. 20.

sults than the many gender commitments that are mostly invitational. It is a slow process and will take time, effort, personnel, and financial resources. But it is important to build on the policies already in place.

Highlights of Affirmative LWF Policies

The LWF has made proactive commitments, and adopted strategic resolutions. But they are not automatically and systematically applied, so it is still a constant uphill task within the Secretariat and member churches to conform to these commitments:

1. Fifty percent participation and leadership of women.
2. Promotion of economic literacy and creation of programs of investment and small-scale credit accessible to women.
3. Allocation of a percentage of the global budget to programs and projects which aim to empower women.
4. Instillation of gender awareness and ensuring that gender is taken seriously in all projects, and ensuring that these projects are considered and approved by a gender-balanced group.
5. Emphasis on funding only those theological schools that provide equal access to theological education for both women and men.
6. Affirmation of the commitment on women's ordination as an expression of the communion of all baptized in Christ giving witness to the Gospel, and:
7. Identification and articulation on violence against women as a sin.

Ways and means to ensure a gender focus in development initiatives are listed in the LWF *Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development* as follows:

- “The protection and promotion of the human rights of women are fundamental to the sustainability of development.
- Sustainable development processes require that the root causes of inequality between men and women are addressed and acted upon.
- Sustainable development requires gender equality and the full leadership of women in all development processes.
- Improving the status of women requires the participation of both men and women; addressing gender issues must be the concern of all people, not only women.
- Sustainable development cannot be gender-neutral.
- The participation and empowerment of women in present as well as future programs is a means as well as a goal in the process of sustainable development.
- All assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation in development work require a gender perspective and analysis which values the work and experience of women, and
- Specific programs and projects for women will continue to need investment in order to ensure that women are fully involved in the development process.”⁴

At its 1992 meeting, the LWF Council provided clear guidelines for the achievement of equality between men and women and adopted a Clear Plan of Action which says: “Women's work in the LWF has been motivated by a vision of the church as an inclusive community. The story of Creation in which all people are created in God's image; the Lutheran theology of Baptism in which all the baptized are one in Christ; and the example of Jesus have served as a basis for establishing ‘women's full participation for a renewed community.’”⁵

A ten-year evaluation report of WICAS work suggested: “The mandate of WICAS should be amended to include a specific gender component, involving responsibility for the promotion and monitoring of gender awareness in all areas of the LWF's work and the work of member churches. ‘Promotion’ should

⁴ *Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development* (Geneva: LWF, 2002), pp. 34-36.

⁵ *A Clear Plan of Action* (Geneva: LWF/DMD-WICAS, 1992), p. 1.

include in-built procedures to ensure that WICAS is able to advise and consult all other LWF desks, which should also be held accountable for working to specific procedures and policies concerning gender. The protection and extension of women's rights and freedoms must continue to be emphasized, but it must be backed-up with gender education and awareness.”⁶

Commitments of the LWF on Gender and Power

During its 1997 Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, the LWF deliberated on the theme “In Christ – Called to Witness,” and identified addressing gender issues as one of the communion’s tasks. Specific gender commitments were made as follows:

a) Tasks of the LWF Communion

“Therefore, the communion of saints is empowered to take risks as:

- reconcilers in a world of divided peoples and churches;
- intercessors for the forgotten, the lost and alone,
- the ignored, the displaced, the dispossessed and despised;
- givers and lovers and caretakers and sharers in a world bent on security, exploitation, consumption and possessions;
- servants in a world which worships its lords of false power and might.”⁷

b) Gender and Power as a Faith, Justice, and Relational Issue

“To speak about gender from a biblical and theological perspective leads us to affirm that our faith in the triune God calls us to acts of justice in these relation-

⁶ “The Unfolding Vision,” An evaluative report on the LWF/DMD Desk for Women in Church and Society 1988 – 1997 (Geneva: LWF Department for Mission and Development, 1998), p. 40.

⁷ Report of the 1997 LWF Ninth Assembly, Hong Kong, p. 46.

ships, including equal regard for one another as men and women, the sharing of power and service, the recognition of gifts and establishment of structures which are accessible and hospitable to all of God’s people.”⁸

c) Gender and Power as an Issue of Leadership

“A balance is needed in our churches between men and women at the leadership level. At the local level, our gatherings often are made up by a majority of women, yet are led by a minority of men, reflecting society rather than being a prophetic sign of Christ breaking through the prevailing system. This affects women and men in destructive ways.”⁹

d) The Need for Biblical Grounding while Discussing Gender Issues

“Discussion of gender issues must have a biblical and theological basis. There is a need for a better understanding of the content and meaning of feminist/ womanist theology to facilitate the gender discussion in the churches. Theology and education have been primarily male-oriented, although Jesus Christ invited both men and women to be his disciples and be witnesses to the world. Education and theology should be gender sensitive, helping both men and women to become more self-aware.”¹⁰

e) Ordination of Women as a Call and Gift from God to the Churches

“The Lutheran World Federation supports the ordination of women and men as a gift from God to the church (Curitiba Assembly, 1990). ...Member churches must continue to dialogue on this subject. In particular, the LWF should stand in solidarity with those women who seek ordination because they

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 49.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

are called by God, but cannot be ordained because women's ordination is not practiced in their home church."¹¹

f) Gender and Power as an Issue of Partnership between Women and Men

"We recognize the need for men and women to participate equally and consensually in the partnership of work; household management; care of children, the elderly, and sick; and life in church and community. Without this partnership women will always be disadvantaged in competitive economic and social environments."

g) Gender and Power as Integral to All Issues

The Assembly committed to call on the member churches of the LWF:

"to actively examine, study and promote gender awareness as it impinges upon theology, education, economics, human sexuality (including sexual harassment, violence and abuse), power sharing in church and community, and family life;"¹²

h) Addressing Violence Inside the Church as well as in Society

The Assembly was very forthright in dealing with violence against women:

"We must confess and acknowledge the sin of the church in tolerating violence against women, especially the abuse of women within the church. Such abuse of ecclesiastical and spiritual power betrays a sacred trust, distorts God's intent for human relationships and does violence to the nature of the church. Attention and resources need to be given to healing for abusers and victims, to assuring that congregations are a safe place for victims of abuse, and to

educating men, women, and children about sexual violence and abuse."¹³

At the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, many gender specific commitments, of more than twenty pages, were submitted from each of the "Village Group" meetings. The editing team had to adjust them to a manageable level and confine them as follows:

i) Promote Full Inclusion of Women and Youth in the Life of Church and Society

- "Challenge sexual stereotypes and raise gender issues early in the life of youth, seeking to build a just community of women and men."
- "Undertake a theological study on how to overcome the barriers that hinder gender mainstreaming (gender equity) and women's ordination (in churches where women are not ordained)."¹⁴
- "Encourage and support one another in study and respectful dialogue on issues of marriage, family and human sexuality, in a manner appropriate to the needs of each member church, and advocacy for the human rights and the dignity of all persons regardless of gender or sexual orientation."¹⁵
- "Encourage and support one another in overcoming violence in families, particularly violent practices against women and children (including harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage) and to create processes of healing and reconciliation within families."¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁴ "Compilation of Resolutions and Statements Adopted by the Tenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation," Winnipeg, Canada, 2003, www.lwf-assembly2003.org/lwf-assembly/htdocs/PDFs/LWF_Assembly_Resolutions-EN, p. 6.

¹⁵ Message from the LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, Canada, 2003, www.lwf-assembly2003.org/lwf-assembly/htdocs/PDFs/LWF_Assembly_Message-EN, p. 14-15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 50

¹² *Ibid.*

Guiding Questions for Further Reflection

1. In your context, who holds the resources, e.g., houses, land, and other moveable and immovable assets?
2. If your church runs development projects, can you identify at which development approach level (WID, WAD, or GAD) they are, and why?
3. Have any of the church-run projects in your context made gender integral to their planning, execution, and evaluation?
4. Have these interventions changed men and women, leading to a more conducive atmosphere and respect for one another's leadership?



APPENDIX 2

MESSAGES FROM LWF REGIONAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP MEETINGS ON GENDER AND POWER

Message from the Latin American Consultation on Gender and Power

São Leopoldo, Brazil,
6-10 September, 2006

The Desk of Women in Church and Society (WICAS), of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) convened a consultation on Gender and Power from the 6th to the 10th of September 2006, in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil. Thirty-eight women, men, and youth, from fifteen countries representing the Latin American Lutheran member churches of the LWF participated in the consultation. We gathered together to study in depth the subject of gender and power. We began on the basis that the Lutheran World Communion is a visible sign of an inclusive communion in this world.

Latin America has a long history of colonization, domination, and a patriarchal culture of supremacy and hierarchy, which affects and infects human relations, institutions and public systems. These institutions and systems replicate and perpetuate the imbalances of power and privilege that are the center of gender relations, and provoke and maintain highly asymmetrical and violent situations that increase exponentially. In view of this reality, concrete answers and actions are needed from the LWF.

The baptismal formula in Galatians 3:23-29 reveals three categories that mark divisions not only in society, but also in the churches: ethnicity, race and religion; class and social status; and divisions that deepen and magnify gender disparities. As an avenue towards counteracting these disparities, we recognize the challenge posed by the gospel, along the basic theological axis, such as:

- The universal priesthood of all believers;
- A Trinitarian and relational theology based on Grace;

- The work and mission of God in the world;
- The power and ministry in the light of the theology of the cross, which paves a path towards transforming our churches and in recreating equal gender relations.

We recognize that feminist theologies have achieved an important track record and represent the drive towards a more inclusive church and society. Often, this contribution is seen as “optional”, marginal, or is passed over in favor of “traditional” theology.

The gathered assembly encourages our Latin American Lutheran Churches, as well as the member churches of the Lutheran World Communion to:

1. Take up, share and study the commitments made on gender during the recent decades, using as a basis the documents from the LWF and the churches in the region, in order to establish some programmatic guidelines;
2. Have the meetings of Conferencia de Liderazgo (COL) provide follow-up with a concrete action plan for each church, based on the information presented;
3. Have each church appoint a team of persons (a minimum of three or four that includes women, youth and men) as an advisory team to step up the work done on gender in church and society;
4. Prepare a regional meeting on the ordination of women and forms of community leadership for transformation;
5. Offer the churches and communities, theological and liturgical guidelines for facili-

- tating the use of inclusive language and a gender-based interpretation of the Bible;
6. Facilitate access to Bible studies that emphasize the equality between men and women as well as leadership and the leading role of women in the life of the churches;
 7. Establish a continental advisory team as a resource for the church programs and workshops and to coordinate the gender work, communications and planning within the churches in the region;
 8. Commit to fully participate in the “Decade to Overcome Violence”, with special emphasis on interpersonal and gender violence. This would include workshops, meeting and materials on handling violence and conflict transformation;
 9. Provide the churches with access to documents relating to international agreements and human rights for women (databanks and materials);
 10. Share the achievements of other sister churches so as to ecumenically channel women’s ministries and gender justice;
 11. Encourage churches that have theological seminaries and educational institutions to consider making gender studies mandatory as part of the curriculum, and encourage the training of teachers in these subjects;
 12. Intentionally include youths in all of these processes and encourage the churches and the LWF to promote studies on the new masculine models with a gender perspective;
 13. Recognize, celebrate and reaffirm the importance of the track record and leadership of women throughout the history of our churches, during the 60th anniversary of the LWF in Lund;
 14. We recommend that the documents and work relating to gender be translated in the

local languages set in the context of our communities, and distributed;

15. We recommend training youth and women to fully participate in all cases of political actions and processes, as well as in decision making.

We thank the Desk for Women in Church and Society of the LWF for making possible this renovation of our commitment to a common path and we highly value the interdisciplinary participation of each participant.

Original text

WICAS consultation on Gender & power for the Africa Region

**Kempton Conference Centre,
Johannesburg, South Africa,
28/11 – 02/12/2007**

1. Preamble

We, the participants from LUCCEA, LUCSEA and LUCSA reflected on “Gender and Power” at the LWF/DMD-WICAS Consultation convened at Kempton Park Conference Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa from 28 November – 02 December 2007. We deliberated on topics such as “Leadership as Servanthood”, “Biblical and Lutheran Understanding on Power”, “Exploration on Gender in African context”, “Gender in Church Context and Present Cultural Realities”. “Challenges of Africa: Environment and Impoverishment”, “Power, Powerlessness and the Cycle of Violence against Women”. “Gender in the Context of HIV/AIDS”, “Healing Creation” and on LWF Commitments for an Inclusive Communion.”

The consultation brought together men and women in diverse church leadership positions within the African Region to discuss and share openly on issues concerning gender violence in the church and the society, especially against women and children.

2. Leadership as Servanthood

We received insights about “Leadership as Servanthood”:

- 2.1 The root causes should be identified and re-defined to pave way for implementing solutions to problems.
- 2.2 The leadership should also be empowered, to become a role model in church and society.
- 2.3 The leadership should imply serving in all ministries as mandated.
- 2.4 The mechanisms for leadership implementation require capacity building.

3. Identification of crucial issues on Gender in African Context

Through sharing of difficult situations in some cases and experiences accumulated by most of our churches in the African continent, the consultation stood in and showed total solidarity especially to women and children because of the number of sufferings and challenges they undergo. We explored a number of burning issues on Gender in the African context and identified mainstreaming challenges in our respective churches as follows:

- 3.1 Women ordination in some regions
- 3.2 Women trafficking for abuses (sign of desperation)
- 3.3 Escalation of Gender violence targeting women
- 3.4 Church’s unawareness of the power involved in gender relations.
- 3.5 Identification and critical analysis needed for dealing with violence against women.

- 3.6 Marriage counseling as a continual process in all stages from courting, wedding to parenting and family life.

4. Resolutions

In view of the realities and concerns expressed during the consultation, the representatives from the African region resolved for the following to be the critical priorities for implementation in their respective churches:

- 4.1 Breaking of silence to speak out against gender based violence.
- 4.2 Building of awareness about faces of gender violence between women & men, women and women, adults and children.
- 4.3 Baseline information to kick start the healing process (healing of the root cause)
- 4.4 Retreat-workshop for Pastors and Church Leaders that should be convened every three to six months so that they are equipped to deal with rising problems at sub-regional level.
- 4.5 Leaders, Women and Youth should be equally represented for participation and involvement in leadership decision making processes within the Church according to the LWF policy (of 40% men, 40% women and 20% youth), in the light of the Holy Scripture.
- 4.6 Irrelevant theologies should be discouraged; teaching against harmful cultural practices linked to traditions supporting man’s supremacy over woman be encouraged.
- 4.7 Women be granted space and visibility at all levels of church structures and constitution.
- 4.8 Women be involved in decision making bodies of the church at all levels
- 4.9 Women be given freedom of expression in the area of theology

4.10 Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in all church's departments

4.11 Media be used in relation to gender to provide data and sensitize on HIV/AIDS at grassroots level.

5. Recommendations

In view of the aforementioned and many other issues on Gender we recommend the following:

5.1 Churches make efforts to advocate/educate/teach—depending on the need of every church—women and children to gain maximum benefit out of provisions of the law in their favor against discrimination and violence in society, and for their rights to own and inherit properties.

5.2 Churches make decisions on family and social issues, e.g. resisting forced marriages, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), wife inheritance and other forms of harmful practices and behaviors.

5.3 Churches advocate for education and disappearance of harmful traditions that traumatize Women and Children.

5.4 Promote of Human Rights to be incorporated in consultations and churches.

5.5 Strong emphasizes be put on Poverty and HIV/AIDS programs designed from the grassroots rather than relying on information circulating from top down.

5.6 The Lutheran World Federation DMD, WICAS, LUCCEA, LUCSA and LUC-CWA, and the stakeholders, including Bishops, General Secretaries, Pastors and Elders, Women and Youth leaders (with the inclusion of Children) should co operate more closely.

5.7 A follow up Consultation on Gender and Power at Regional level with Women and

Youth leaders should be organized by LWF/DMD-WICAS in 2008 in LUCCWA.

5.8 The institution of a gender desk at sub-regional level of the Africa Region running with a full time staff financed by the LWF who will coordinate and share information with the member churches.

5.9 The WICAS Regional Coordinators design gender programs relevant to the challenges in their own regions.

5.10 Churches make sure that gender issues are incorporated in the teaching / training programs of all theological institutions.

5.11 Where they do not exist, men's forums be encouraged in our churches as a place for dealing with issues relating to gender and violence.

6. Concluding remarks

We wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Lutheran World Federation and WICAS Desk for giving us the opportunity to take part in the GENDER and POWER consultation. We give our praise to God for the life and ministry of the LWF member churches and for looking at the future with hope.

Original text

Message from Asia Consultation: "Women Leadership, an Approach to Gender and Power" Hong Kong, 27-31 August 2009

Both women and men are created in the image of God. (Gen. 1:27)

"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." Galatians 3:28

We, 45 women and men representing Lutheran World Federation member churches in Asia, gather to consult on the theme “Women Leadership, an Approach to Gender and Power.”

Women in Asia, as in many other parts of the world, still live with various kinds of difficulties, not only in society but also in the church. The majority of our church members are women, but in terms of church leadership, they are still in the minority.

We have seen an increase in ordained women pastors in the Asian Lutheran churches; however, the leadership model is still predominantly patriarchal. A key to realizing the potential for a gender-balanced church lies in increasing the number of ordained women pastors, giving rise to complementary leadership. Additionally, we recognize that a discussion on gender issues is not confined to women, but for all members of the church.

Key Issues

1. A historically male-dominated (patriarchal and chauvinist) culture in Asia has been threatening the dignity of women.
2. The majority of women in Asia live in poverty. They have limited access to resources in a male-dominated global economic system.
3. Fewer women than men have been ordained in the majority of Asian Lutheran churches. In some churches, women are denied ordination.
4. The HIV and AIDS epidemic is worsening and adversely affecting women and children.
5. The exploitation of women in various forms (e.g., sexual harassment, sexual abuse, cyber sex, violence and trafficking) is worsening.
6. Regional theological dialogues and agreements about women’s ordination among Lutheran churches are needed.

Recommendations

1. The transformation of Asian culture is an ongoing process which has to be done in a holistic and culturally-sensitive manner. This includes the transformation of institutions (e.g., the family, school, church, media and government) that have directly or indirectly perpetuated patriarchal beliefs and practices. Some recommendations are as follows:
 - a. Encourage the teaching and practice of gender equality and balance in the family.
 - b. Encourage men to participate in nurturing roles.
 - c. Encourage youth to develop gender-balanced mindsets and values, and provide them with gender justice education.
2. The role and contribution of women are to be recognized in both private and public sectors. To liberate women from poverty and its disadvantages, we:
 - a. Support and empower women economically by raising their awareness, and providing them with education, training, opportunities for employment, access to resources etc.
 - b. Plan, implement and oversee programs for capacity building which will eventually benefit women and their families.
3. To ensure more women are ordained in Asian Lutheran churches, we recommend the following:
 - a. Include gender studies as a compulsory part of the curriculum and work towards gender mainstreaming of theological seminaries.
 - b. Encourage and create opportunities for women to study theology, and to be ordained in their respective Asian Lutheran churches.
 - c. Recognize the full potential and authority of ordained women pastors by assigning them as independent pastors-in-charge of congregations.
 - d. Include women in ecclesiastical decision making bodies through dialogues.

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4. We should work on preventing HIV and controlling the AIDS epidemic by theologically addressing attitudes of friendship, acceptance, and respect. We should suspend moral judgments and stigmatization, and address structural justice with practical measures. One of these measures would be to build sustainable and empowering networks at local, regional and international levels.
 5. There must be zero tolerance for any type of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation of women and children. We should speak out against such incidents in the church and in society, and collaborate with other like-minded bodies, to create local, regional and international solidarity through networks.
 6. As Asian Lutheran women and men, our commitment is to find ways to bring about gender

justice according to our cultural context and reality. There is a genuine need to develop an Asian Lutheran approach to gender that recognizes the strengths of women in traditional Asian cultures. Some recommendations are as follows:

- a. Initiate theological dialogues—especially with those who are policy-makers or in decision making bodies, so that the access to resources can be improved and the obstacles about women’s ordination can be removed.
- b. Provide funds for follow up programs and translation of the “Gender and Power” document into different local languages.
- c. Encourage the drafting of gender policy guidelines in Asian Lutheran churches, and the monitoring of the progress of gender justice.

Original text



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