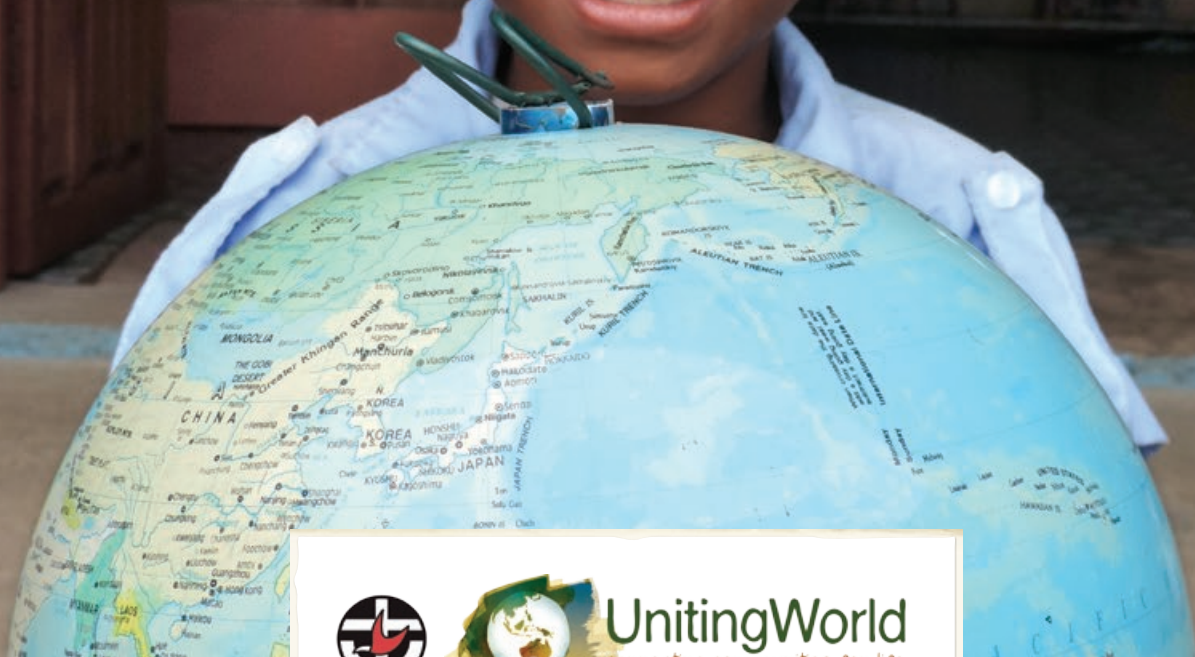


FRAMEWORK PAPER

Human Dignity and Gender Equality from a Biblical-Theological Perspective



UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

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FOREWORD

These resources have been developed and produced by UnitingWorld as a response to learning from partner Churches in the Pacific, especially from women's fellowship organisations.

Gender roles are determined by a society and its culture. As such they outline the acceptable roles, modes of interaction and even relative worth of men and women within a context, and are often enforced by the society's powerholders. Often in Christian communities these socially and culturally assigned roles are reinforced by interpretations of biblical theology. Traditionally these interpretations place men as the natural and rightful leaders, decision-makers and heads of the household and determine that women are to be submissive and subordinate. This is often the experience within the home, the Church and the wider community in the Pacific and around the world. Sadly, gender-based violence, violence against women and children, and domestic violence are too frequently the outplaying reality of such unequal gender roles and relationships.

UnitingWorld has listened to the voices of our partners in the Pacific and understand that sustainable and transformative change needs to be led by our shared faith, must be culturally and contextually embedded, and must be founded strongly on Biblical principles. As such, these Biblical resources have been written by Rev Dr Cliff Bird, a prominent Pacific theologian from the Solomon Islands and provide the foundation for UnitingWorld's "Partnering Women for Change" (PW4C) program. This program is a holistic approach to addressing gender inequality by working with churches through engaging together in faith-based reflection of God's intended human equality; by supporting churches to support and protect women and child and victim of violence and to seek a just response in line with national laws; and by empowering women to build their capacity and confidence in their own God-given gifts to contribute in leadership and their voice in decision-making.

As Jesus proclaimed "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). These resources seek to open the freedom within this promise made to all people as created equally in the image of God to be the lived experience for all women, men, girls and boys.

UnitingWorld acknowledges with gratitude the wisdom of those from our church partners who have directed and informed the production of these resources; UnitingWorld's Pacific Team who have worked together to develop this holistic approach to transformative change; and Australian Aid who are providing funding support to aspects of the PW4C Program through which these resources will be delivered.



About the Author

Rev Dr Cliff Bird is a distinguished Pacific theologian and Minister of the United Church in the Solomon Islands. He has a background in economics and a Ph.D in theology from Charles Sturt University. Previous to his role of Pacific Regional Coordinator with UnitingWorld Cliff was a Senior Lecturer and Head of Department of Theology and Ethics at the Pacific Theological College in Fiji.

OVERVIEW

Equality between men and women, male and female, is a much debated issue around the world. In fact it is a perennial issue in many cultures and contexts. Whether or not this is acknowledged and expressed publicly, many cultures and cultural traditions demonstrate that somehow women are not equal to men, and that men and what they do are more superior to women and what they do. The various expressions of Christianity which penetrated the islands of the Pacific came with their traditional readings and interpretations of the Bible and their prevailing theological understandings did not help much with transforming unequal relationships. On the contrary, these interpretations and theologies cemented much of the existing relational practices in society. The major focus of the various missions was more on the salvation of 'heathens' rather than on preaching and practicing equality between women and men and their God-given dignity. This was not surprising because much of the Christianity (or Christianities) that was (or were) introduced into the island communities

was built on and supported (knowingly or otherwise) by philosophical ideas which did not think very highly of women or of being female.

This paper aims to challenge the cultural views and practices, the biblical interpretations and philosophical arguments referred to above, which in many situations result in abuse of and violence against women and girls. The paper presents and affirms the truth that biblically and theologically women and men are equal before God and each other. What this demands is a rereading, rethinking, reinterpretation and reapplication of biblical texts which are relevant to the relationship between women and men. Many people who read this paper may find this approach a challenge, but this needs to happen if we are to (re)capture the dignity and equality which God intended for all people in the very beginning.





INTRODUCTION

A word about Cultures and Cultural Traditions.

In thinking about gender issues, especially gender equality and gender-based violence (GBV), it is important to consider our cultures and traditions. We all know that our cultures and traditions influence the way we think about one another, relate to one another and treat one another. We are brought up and socialised into our cultures and everywhere we go and wherever we are we bring our cultures not only with us but in us. What we are allowed to do and not do, what we are allowed to say and not say, how we are expected to behave and not to behave, what we believe and not believe, the way that we see or perceive people and things and do not see or perceive them, the stories that we tell and do not tell, and even what we eat-drink and do not eat-drink, etc. are dictated and influenced by our cultural view of the world, our experiences in and of that world, our “place” in that world and our upbringing in it.

In other words, our cultures and traditions set the patterns and ways according to which we are expected to live and move and have

our being. These patterns provide us with meanings and order and enable us to transmit such meanings from one generation to another. Commonly these patterns come down to us and are communicated in and through symbols.¹ These symbols can be simple with a single or a few meaning(s), or could be quite complex with multiple meanings. At the simple end, a traditional club for instance is a symbol of war and death, and a traditional shield is a symbol of protection and safety. At the complex end, in most cultures in Oceania, land – (Fiji vanua, Maori whenua, Samoa fanua, Tonga fonua, Maohi Nui fenua, Solomon Islands hanua, Vanuatu tanoda etc.) – for instance is understood both literally and symbolically. As a symbol land is loaded with multiple meanings: it can mean life and livelihood; it can mean times for different activities and seasons; it can mean heritage and ancestral connections; it can mean “mother,” and so forth.²

In many of our Oceanic cultures, symbols have also been associated with people: chiefs are symbols of the gods, and of power and

1 See Clifford. Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

2 For further discussion on these see Tuwere, Ilaitia S. Vanua: *Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies/University of the South Pacific, 2002. Also Tofaeono, Ama'amalele. *Eco-Theology: AIGA – The Household of God, A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*. Erlangen: Erlangen Verl. Fur Mission und Okumene, 2000.

authority to rule; warriors are symbols of bravery and power and wars; and men are symbols of leadership, knowledge, headship and superiority. Generally speaking, in many cultures women are symbols of childbearing, sex and sensuality, home and housework and kitchen, passivity, sacrifice and obedience, and fertility (and if they cannot bear children they are blamed for sterility, and worse, ridiculed and castigated – even if it is the man who is sterile!). All in all, our cultures and cultural traditions influence and shape our total being in every way, and unfortunately girls and women are usually the losers and victims of most cultural and traditional upbringing.

It is important to always remember that cultures do not come down to us as a pre-packaged whole from above, or from some divine being outside the human community or society. Cultures are human constructs; that is, we humans create and make cultures. We establish the patterns and symbols and we give meanings to these. Even the ways that we relate to our gods are established by humans: we create and establish the rules about worship; we make and establish the rituals that we carry out; we make and establish the times to worship; we set the appropriate kinds of behaviour to be exhibited at worship; we interpret events, patterns and symbols in ways that are meaningful, and so forth. One vital point, however, needs to be remembered in all this: the bottom-line is that it is people who elevate themselves as someone with authority, or people upon whom society has invested with authority for one reason or other, who usually determine what goes and what does not. In many cultures, it is usually the men, and certain men, who determine and set societal requirements, norms and expectations. This situation where men are the ones who control and rule, and set the rules, standards, requirements, etc. and expect everyone else, especially women and children, to follow and obey is what is commonly described as patriarchy.

Finally, because patterns and symbols of cultures are communicated through time and across generations, they change. Cultures are not

static; they do not remain the same over time, but rather, they change and take on new forms and expressions. New patterns and symbols can take the place of older and/or existing ones. New meanings are derived from old patterns and symbols, and new meanings also come with new patterns and symbols. Changes in cultures can happen from within societies or from the outside of societies. Changes can both be advantageous and/or disadvantageous, beneficial and/or harmful.

Because cultures are always changing, it is increasingly difficult to make a claim or argument that is absolute or a claim that holds true for all time. For example, many communities and/or churches do not allow girls and women to wear trousers because this is supposedly against their culture. But which and whose culture are we talking about? When it comes to cultural dress codes, our good ancestors were either naked or barely clothed. Thus the argument that it is against culture for girls and women to wear trousers is not an absolute. Another example: most of the cultures in the Pacific continue to see home and the kitchen as the place for girls and women. However, the entry and impacts of formal education, paid employment, and the explosion of social and religious choices have brought immense changes, both beneficial and harmful. The point is that it is no longer appropriate to make an absolute claim that is based on or legitimised by culture because cultures are always changing.

A word about the Bible.

The Bible holds and plays a very central and vital part in the various expressions of Christianity in the island churches of the South Pacific. It is not a generalisation to say that in most of the different church traditions, the Bible is taken and accepted with little question as The Word of God. While some theological institutions and very few churches come to the Bible from a more academic and, therefore, more analytical approach, the majority treat the Bible as sacred

and come to it for insights and answers to almost every kind of issue, problem and challenge, or when confronted with different kinds of situations in life. Because the Bible is taken as the word of God, most interpretations of a biblical text tend to be literal or to take what the Bible says at face value. Most interpretations also tend to ignore the immediate and broader context of a biblical text, just as they fail to take into account the social, cultural and economic contexts



of the text. For example the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:22, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” (English Standard Version), is taken literally and out of context at most times. It is taken to mean that wives must always submit to their husbands and live under

their leadership. This is an interpretation that is taken out of context because it does not take into account what is said in verse 21. Verse 21 says, “Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ,” (Good News Translation). It is not only wives who must submit to their husbands but husbands, too, who must submit to their wives. When read within its proper context, marriage is not a one-way submission; rather it is about mutual submission where the love of God through Jesus Christ is the standard. The literal interpretation also fails to take into account the socio-economic systems and structures, and the patriarchal (or male dominated) culture in which the text was written, and which determined relationships within family.

But what is the Bible? The English word Bible originally comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which means books. The Bible is therefore a collection of books or a library of books, not just one simple book. The Protestant canon has 66 books (Old Testament 39 and New Testament 27) while the Catholic canon has 73 books (OT 46 and NT 27). The explanation for this difference is that there are 7 books which are in the Catholic canon that are not in the Protestant canon. The point is that the Bible is not just one book but a library of many books.

Behind the books of the Bible are many different writers. Some of the books are written by one person while some other books are compiled, edited and put together by one or more people. Some of the books that bear one name as the author are, in actual fact, written by another person – a practice which was commonly practiced during the time when books of the New Testament (NT) were written. Effectively, what this means is that there are so many different voices and words in the texts of scripture, including the words and voice of the authors and those attributed to God, to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. There are also voices and words of so many people who are part and parcel of the stories recorded and told, and the majority of these are male voices and words. Then there are many

other voices and words that are not recorded or heard – voices that are silenced and words that are not heard – and these are mostly the voices and words of women. To be true, there are multiple words and voices about women and to women – not voices of or by women – but in most cases these do not reflect positively about women. In all of these the question is: how do we discern the words and voice of God among multiple words and voices that are in the Bible?

The books of the bible were written or compiled over a time span of more than two thousand years. It is important to remember that within this time span are different historical epochs, experiences and events. Take the New Testament canon:

- The New Testament did not fall from heaven;
- The New Testament was not delivered by an angel;
- The New Testament was not found as a package in a field or a particular place;
- The New Testament was not suddenly “discovered” in a clay jar with 27 books pre-packaged and intact, like the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi texts.

The development and compilation of the New Testament can be traced historically, and happened over a significant period of history. One historian puts it in this way: “The New Testament developed, or evolved, over the course of the first 250-300 years of Christian history. No one particular person made the decision. The decision was not made at a church council. The particular writings that became those of the New Testament gradually came into focus and became the most trusted and beneficial of all the early Christian writings.”³ There were several other books, including Gospels and Epistles, which were not included into the canon of the

New Testament. The most well-known among these is the Gospel of Thomas.

There are various different forms of writing in the Bible. For instance in the Old Testament there are books that include:

- **Creation myths and legends:** (e.g. Genesis, parts of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)
- **Legal codes:** (e.g. Leviticus, parts of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)
- **Semi-historical:** (e.g. Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings)
- **Prophetic:** (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, etc.)
- **Psalms and Songs:** (e.g. Psalms, Songs of Solomon)
- **Proverbs:** Proverbs
- **Prayers/Laments:** (e.g. Lamentations, Psalms)
- **Wisdom literature:** (e.g. Job)
- **Apocalypse:** (e.g. Daniel)

Books of the New Testament include:

- Gospels (e.g. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)
- Letters: (e.g. letters attributed to Paul)
- Church orders: (e.g. 1 Timothy, Titus)
- Homily/Sermon: (e.g. Hebrews)
- Wisdom literature: (e.g. James)
- Apocalypse: (e.g. Revelation)

To put all this into perspective, it is common knowledge that we read books according to their forms or types. For instance, we read a history book not primarily as a love story; we read newspapers not as encyclopaedias for news; we read a biography not as a biology book; we read poetry not as legal documents. Similarly, we read the book of Genesis not as a science text book, be it physics, biology, geology or chemistry; we read the books that contain legal codes in the Old Testament not as the gospels of the New Testament; we read the prophetic books of the Old Testament not as the letters of Paul in the New Testament; we read the Psalms and

³ R.A. Baker. 2008. “How the New Testament Canon was Formed.” <http://www.churchhistory101.com/docs/New-Testament-Canon.pdf>, cited 14-07-14. The criteria for either accepting or rejecting writings for the NT canon were agreed to after the books and epistles were written, not before.

Proverbs in the Old Testament not as we read the book of Acts, and so on. This is a very important point to remember when reading the Bible.

A final point to remember is that the books of the Bible were written or compiled as records or as responses to different life situations, and were meant for different groups of people in their particular times in history. For instance, Genesis (as were Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) was written in response to the Israelites exile in Babylon, which was roughly from 598 – 538 BCE. From this perspective the spirit of Genesis is about Israel's self-identity as a nation and as a people in relation to God. Genesis is about the Israelites seeking to affirm self-identity and some kind of order and meaning in the context of exile – suffering, emptiness and chaos. It is not a science text book on how the world began. Another example: take the book or apocalypse of Revelation. The book of Revelation cannot be understood adequately and correctly if the situation in and for which it was written is not taken into account. Primarily Revelation was written as a resistance piece of literature to meet a crisis, which was the ruthless persecution of the early church by the Roman authorities.⁴ Many Christians in the early church were martyred. The book is, then, an encouragement and call to Christians of the first century to stand firm in the faith and to avoid compromise with paganism, despite the threat of adversity and martyrdom. The book counsels them to await patiently the fulfilment of God's mighty promises. Revelation asserts that final victory over evil belongs to God. The book of Revelation is not a neat timetable of what will happen or not happen in the future; it is not a prediction of the things that will take place in any sequential order. It is about standing firm and not giving up in the midst of pain, suffering and trials; it is about resisting evil in whatever

form; and it is about the assurance of God's presence in the thick of things, and the hope that in the end victory belongs to God and to all faithful followers of the Son of God. This message remains true for today and into the future.

In light of all that is said above, what do the many and different books of the Bible, written in another time and place for different reasons and purposes, have for churches and Christians in the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) today and for those yet to come? How might churches and Christians in the Pacific Island Countries see and engage with the books of the Bible?

We approach the Bible to seek and discern the voice and words of God for our own times and situations today. In our human attempts to discern God's voice and words in the Bible we must remember that:

- *The Bible contain many other voices and words;*
- *The Bible contain many other voices and words that are not heard;*
- *The Bible consist of many different books written* over a significantly long period of time by many different people meant for different purposes and people;
- There are many different cultures and traditions and religious practices in the Bible;
- There are all kinds of stories – journeys, wars and battles, empires rising and falling, killings and murders, love and compassion, laughter and sorrow, alliances and divisions, love and forgiveness, and so on.

So how might churches in PICs approach the library of books known as the Bible and relate to it? It is affirmed here that the most appropriate and promising way is to see and accept the Bible as a library of books that has so many stories of experiences to tell:

- stories about peoples, their cultures, their times, situations and experiences;
- stories about a particular group of people

4 For a well-argued case for this perspective see Walter Pilgrim, 1999, *Uneasy Neighbours: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress press). See especially his chapter 4 on "Ethic of Resistance: The Book of Revelation." See also Walter Wink, 1992, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).

(Israelites), their cultures, their many and varied experiences in/through life, and their hopes and desires for the future;

- stories of how people, especially Israelites, tried to organise and govern themselves according to rules and commandments they received, and according to the practices and rituals that have evolved over time;
- stories about leaders and their experiences;
- stories about common people and people of low social standing and their experiences;
- stories and experiences of atrocities committed against the “other” and the “different” and so on.

The words of contextual theologian Stephen Bevans (quoted at length below) are indeed insightful and very appropriate in speaking and thinking about the place of scriptures in the all-important and necessary task of making the Bible and theology relevant to different times and situations:

When we recognize that Scripture and tradition are records of experiences – the experience of liberation from oppressor Egypt, or of deliverance from starvation in the desert, or of the disappointment with kings, or of the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, or of Paul’s struggles to persuade communities not to insist on Jewish traditions, or of Arius’ insistence on Jesus’ creaturehood, or of a controversy over Eucharistic presence – we will recognize that doing contextual theology is doing exactly what the authors of Scripture and the makers of tradition did. While there is question of the normativity of these sources of theology, we have to realize that when they were doing the theology that resulted in a particular book of Scripture or a particular doctrinal

expression, the only thing they had was their present experience in their particular context and the norming texts, doctrines, personages, and art of their past.⁵

However, what makes the Bible a very special library of books for Christians is the element of the place, involvement and engagement of God in these stories. Within the contours of these very human stories, there are stories of God’s “Word” being spoken, delivered and declared, and stories of God’s actions recorded. Thus, many of the human stories recorded in the books of the Bible are variously flavoured with perceptions and experiences of God, and are interwoven with stories of God and stories about God. From this angle the Bible embodies the interweaving or the entangling of human stories and experiences with God and with stories of God and about God as seen, understood and experienced by those who wrote the stories. We read these stories, learn from these stories, ask questions about these stories, and see and think how these stories and our own stories resonate or do not resonate. How do these biblical stories reflect or tell our own stories? How do our own stories stand in relation to the stories in the Bible? Where is God in these our stories? How is God seen or understood to be involved or not involved, active or not active, in our own stories as God was seen and understood to be involved in many stories in the Bible? How could or might the stories in the Bible guide, enlighten and empower us as our own stories, both individually and corporately, continue to unfold and develop before us and before God? As Bevans points out, ultimately engaging the Bible contextually today is a “theology of rich and challenging dialogue: dialogue that tries to articulate my context, my experience, and dialogue of this experience with the experience of Christians

5 Stephen B. Bevans. 2011. “What Has Contextual Theology to Offer the Church of the Twenty-First Century?,” in Stephen B. Bevans and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (eds.) *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012), 10.

down through the ages that we find in Scripture and Christian tradition.”⁶

Approaching and understanding the Bible in the way affirmed above does not negate or nullify the “Word of God” in it. Rather it helps us to see that everything that we say or write or think about God is always from the position and point of view of human beings. It is always important to remember that we seek to know and understand God **ONLY** in our humanness. All the writings and books that came as “inspiration” still needed human hands, fingers, eyes, ears and brain to put into written and/or spoken words. No word can fall from the sky and land on a blank sheet of paper! The human element must always be taken into account, including human biases, preferences, motivations and even human errors. As Choan-Seng Song said, “Human beings cannot claim glimpses of the divine reality if one bypasses human realities.”⁷ Approaching the Bible in the way described above also prevents the abuse of God’s word by Christian fundamentalists/extremists and self-proclaimed prophets or divine figures. The history of Christianity has numerous examples of people who claimed to be hearing God’s word or to be speaking on God’s behalf and had engaged in the inhuman and destructive treatment of fellow human beings. Finally, approaching the Bible in the way affirmed here gives a level of recognition and appreciation of our own stories and experiences, past and present and yet to be, and the interweaving of God’s story with our own, and especially God’s story as revealed in and through Jesus the Christ.

A word about Western Philosophy.

Even before the emergence of Hebrew monotheism (belief in one God) and the birth and spread of Christianity, the social system and structure where the father, and generally men,

rule was already practiced. This social-structural system is generally described as patriarchy. It was neither Judaism nor Christianity which introduced patriarchy into the world.⁸ Patriarchy is a very ancient and widespread system of male domination, and both Judaism and Christianity proved incapable of successfully opposing this system.⁹ Hebrew monotheism or Judaism embraced and adapted this socio-cultural system and structure, which is contained and reflected in the Old Testament. In this social and cultural system women were treated as inferior to men and were regarded as properties of men and were, therefore, required to live under the leadership and control of men.¹⁰

This situation regarding the status of women remained the same even into the time of Jesus, in which a female did not have any real prospects. In her childhood and youth a female was under the ownership and control of her father; in her married life she was under the ownership and control of her husband; if her husband died and she became a widow, she was under the control of her eldest son. In actual fact prior to, during and even after the time of Jesus a woman had no real life of her own. The systems and structures of society were built for men, not for women, and these systems and structures worked against girls and women. The truth was that everything in society was systematised and structured in such a way that made sure a woman remained under male control and leadership. These systems and structures were legitimised through religion and

⁶ Bevens, 10.

⁷ Choan-Seng Song, 1979, *Third-Eye Theology* (New York: SCM Press), 12.

⁸ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jürgen Moltmann, “Becoming Human in New Community,” in Constance F. Parvey (ed.), *The Community of Women and Men in the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983), 31.

⁹ According to Sandra Scheiders, ‘Patriarchy is the term that refers to the ideology and social system of “father rule,” which was the virtually universal pattern of social organization in the world of the Bible. The biblical text pervasively reflects this domination-subordination pattern in human relations and often legitimates it as divinely ordained. Religiously legitimated or sacralized patriarchy is called hierarchy.’ See Sandra M. Scheiders, “The Bible and Feminism: Biblical Theology,” in Catherine Mowry LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 34.

¹⁰ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 8-10.

culture, and through references to God.

The subordination of women was very much part and parcel of Western civilisation. This superiority of men and inferiority of woman was given its philosophical foundations and underpinnings particularly through the work of the philosopher Aristotle. Thus it is not only cultures and the Bible that have worked against women and their inequality with men, although these two have been highlighted time and again. What is not usually highlighted, or perhaps even deliberately ignored, is that Western philosophy has established and perpetuated a rather inferior and negative view about women and femaleness for such a long time. The lowly and inferior place of women that appears even in some of the epistles attributed to Paul reflects this philosophical influence. As Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jürgen Moltmann point out, "Christianity was already taken over by men and made to serve patriarchy,"¹¹ quite early on.

In other words, these philosophical bases of the denial of equality of women with men, which were deeply ingrained in Western civilisation, were embraced by Christianity from its very beginnings. These philosophical bases were then "Christianised" and undergirded the dominant interpretations of scriptures that relate to women, such as interpretations of the Genesis creation narratives discussed earlier. These dominant interpretations which were part and parcel of the worldviews and life of Westerners/Europeans who entered the Pacific penetrated the islands through the work and life of traders and pioneer missionaries and found easy acceptance in various receptor cultures that already had similar views about women and girls.

But what are these inferior and negative philosophical views about women and about

being female? A brief look at what Aristotle said and propagated is in order. Aristotle lived within the period 384BCE-322BCE. He was a very influential Greek philosopher, a student of Plato and teacher of the very famous Alexander the Great. However, while Plato had some positive views about the place and role of women in the governance of society, Aristotle built a philosophical foundation which put women back in the kitchen or worse. Following are some of his major philosophical articulations:¹²

- A woman is an incomplete and damaged human being, and is of an entirely different order than man, and thus by nature is inferior to man and must therefore be subordinate to, and ruled by, men. Only man is a fully developed human, and 'the generation of the female is no better than that of a "mutilated male."'¹³
- Woman is not only physically deficient but is also both intellectually and morally deficient. A woman's intellectual ability and her moral capacity are less than those of a man and, therefore, needs always to subject herself to man.
- The ability of woman to reason and to think clearly and constructively is weak and, therefore, tends to be more irrational than man. Man on the other hand has strong ability to reason, and as such woman must be subject to the man.
- Woman is ruled more by her emotions, appetites and bodily desires while man is ruled by the power of the mind and his sense of logic.
- In the conception of human life woman plays the passive role through her material body while it is the man who plays the

11 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jürgen Moltmann, "Becoming Human in New Community," in Constance F. Parvey (ed.), *The Community of Women and Men in the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983), 31.

12 For an informative overview see Nicholas D Smith, "Plato and Aristotle on the Nature of Women," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 21:4 (1983), 467-478. See also Cynthia Freeland, "Nourishing Speculation: A Feminist Reading of Aristotelian Science," in *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle*, Bat-Ami Bar On (ed.), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994; Cynthia Freeland (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.

13 Smith, 467.

active role. It is the active man who fashions the woman's passive body in the procreation of new life.

- It is natural for a woman to lead a quiet, sedentary life, staying indoors to nurture children and to look after possessions acquired by her "natural ruler," man, who is well constituted for activities outside the home.

What made Aristotle's philosophy so powerful and influential for more than two millennia is that he presented and advocated it as the "natural" order of things and the natural order of relationships in the family and in the wider society. It got deeply ingrained in Western civilisation and Christianity, thanks to this "natural" order being turned into theology of the "divine" order of things and of human families and societies. This Aristotelian anti-woman philosophy got the better of Early Christianity and persevered into the Middle Ages and beyond, and Western theologies and theologians have perpetuated this situation. In other words, the subjugation of women is embedded in classical Christian theology from the beginnings of Christianity to the modern times. A brief look at what some of the influential men said or wrote will show that Aristotle's thoughts had influenced and underpinned much of Western Christian theology and biblical interpretations – theology and interpretations that were introduced to the PICs by pioneer missionaries.

- **Tertullian** (155-245 CE): Wrote that only man is the image of God and that woman, through the curse of Eve, had destroyed God's image, the man. He wrote about woman: "You are the devil's gateway; you are she who first violated the forbidden tree and broke the law of God. It was you who coaxed your way around him whom the devil had not the force to attack. With what ease you shattered that image of God: Man! Because of the death you merited, even the Son of God had to die

... Woman, you are the gate to hell."¹⁴

- **Saint Augustine** (354-430 CE):¹⁵ Wrote that man only is the (normative) image of God. Woman has the image of God only after the man. Because woman is so prone to her bodily functions and desires and to sin, she needs to be redeemed in order to participate in God's image. However, it is only when the woman is seen together with her husband in and through marriage that she can then participate in the image of God. Augustine wrote that according to the natural order of relationships, men rule over women, women serve their husbands and children serve their parents. It is unnatural if the woman gives the commands and the husband obeys. For Augustine, natural justice is when the weaker serve the stronger and powerful.
- **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274 CE): Wrote that woman is a failed male [a mutilated, defective male]. Thomas stresses, however, that this does not imply that women were not part of God's grand scheme of creation; it implies that a female is not perfect. Woman is a monster of nature. In procreation the active principle is male and the passive is female. This active principle in the male is inherited from the male parent and also from the heavenly bodies. While the law of nature demands the coming together of male and female in the procreation of life, it is the male that is superior in the process.
- **Martin Luther** (1483-1546): Martin Luther the great reformer held some positive views about women, but these were overshadowed by his more negative views. Luther wrote that had Eve not fallen and committed the original sin, she would

14 Quotation from Tertullian's work *On the Apparel of Women*, chapter 1. See post by Valerie Tarico "Twenty Vile Quotes Against Women By Church Leaders from St Augustine to Pat Robertson," on <http://valerietarico.com/2013/07/01/mysogynistquoteschurchfathers/>, cited 15/09/14.

15 For insightful reading see Judith Chelius Stark, *Feminist Interpretation of St Augustine*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000

have been equal with Adam. He said that through the Fall and as punishment for the Fall, woman lost her original equality with man and became inferior in mind and body. Woman belongs within fallen history and is subject to the male as her superior. Luther contends very strongly that, "The rule remains with the husband, and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command. He [husband] rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions [including the wife], tills the soil, builds, plants, etc. The woman, on the other hand, is like a nail driven into the wall. She sits at home ... the wife should stay at home and look after the affairs of the household as one who has been deprived of the ability of administering those affairs that are outside and concern of the state."¹⁶ He said that a woman's function is to bear children, a function that is physiologically suitable for her given her broad hips. Man on the other hand has broad chest which accounts for the wisdom and intellectual superiority over woman.

- **Karl Barth** (1886-1968): Karl Barth was one of the most influential and respected theologians of Western Protestant Christianity. His theological contributions are monumental; however, his views on women were still not liberating for women. He agreed with Calvin that man and woman are equally made in the image of God. However, he said that this was not the issue: the issue was that the social order which God had ordained from the beginning was the rule of some [men, husbands, masters, etc.] and the subjugation of others [women, wives, slaves etc.] – this is what matters. Barth justified this view as reflecting the covenant of creation. For Barth, created order of male over women reflects the covenant of creation. The covenant of nature has not been annulled but re-established in the

covenant of grace by which Jesus Christ as head rules his people as obedient servants. Male and female, then, are necessarily ordered in a relation of those who lead and follow. As such men and women should accept their own place in this order, the man humbly and the woman willingly. Man is not exalted thereby, nor is woman debased, but they fulfil their own place in the divinely decreed scheme of things by accepting their proper place. Barth advocates the view that that a woman's real humanity is being the wife of a man. Outside of their marriages women have no real purpose at all.

What is obvious from the above examples of what is said by well-known men in the history of Western Christianity is that biblical interpretations and theologies have firmly established and perpetuated the view that women are inferior to men and less important than men. Both Catholic and Protestant male theologians have successfully contributed to inferiorising women for a very long time.¹⁷ What is also clear is that much of what these

17 It must be acknowledged that there were indeed outstanding women in the history of medieval and later Christianity: Juliana of Norwich, Theresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena – all of Catholic tradition; Katharina von Bora (companion and partner of renown reformer Martin Luther under whose epoch-changing influence her own potential and contributions were overshadowed), and Catherine Zell both of Protestant tradition. Catherine Zell for instance "was a zealous promoter of the Reformation and supporter of equality between women and men," (Bollam Moses, 2007, "Women Who Influenced Protestant Reformation in Europe," <http://utcbd2007-08.blogspot.com/2007/08/women-who-influenced-protestant.html>.) Matthew Zell who wedded her was ex-communicated for marrying her, and to which she responded by publishing a letter to the bishop to defend clerical marriage. In the letter she said, "You remind me that the apostle Paul told women to be silent in church. I would remind you of the word of this same apostle that in Christ there is no longer male nor female (Gal. 3:28) and of the prophecy of Joel (2:28-9): 'I will pour forth my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy.' I do not pretend to be John the Baptist rebuking the Pharisees. I do not claim to be Nathan, upbraiding David. I aspire only to be Balaam's ass, castigating his master," (ibid). Hers was a prophetic voice! Be this it may have been the voices and vision of such women were drowned out and overshadowed in the world dominated by patriarchy. For more informative reading see the trilogy by Ronald H. Bainton: *Women of the Reformation: In Germany and Italy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1971), *Women of the Reformation: France and England* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1973), and *Women of the Reformation: From Spain to Scandinavia* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1977).

16 Rosemary Radford Ruether. 1983. *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*. London: SCM Press, 97.

theologians said and wrote about women and being female is a theological restatement and development of what Aristotle said about women and being female more than 300 years before the time of Jesus. In this way both Aristotelian philosophy and the history of Western biblical interpretations and theological articulations have worked against the common humanity and dignity of women and their equality with men. Count in cultures and

traditions in the PICs that already have a low and negative view of women and we have an almost invincible three-pronged power structure that continues to hold women down and deny them their God-given human dignity and their equality with men. What is most disturbing is that this power structure continues to be justified as the natural order of things and relationships that were ordained by God from the very beginning.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN

Bearing in mind the foregoing discussion on culture/cultural traditions, Christian scriptures and Western philosophy, it is important and necessary that biblical and theological foundations on the common humanity, dignity and equality of women and men are established and affirmed. These foundations derive from the rich tapestry of both Old Testament and New Testament sources and their proper theological interpretation and understanding. In particular biblical and theological insights from the Genesis creation narratives, the Prophets, and the Gospels are identified and articulated.

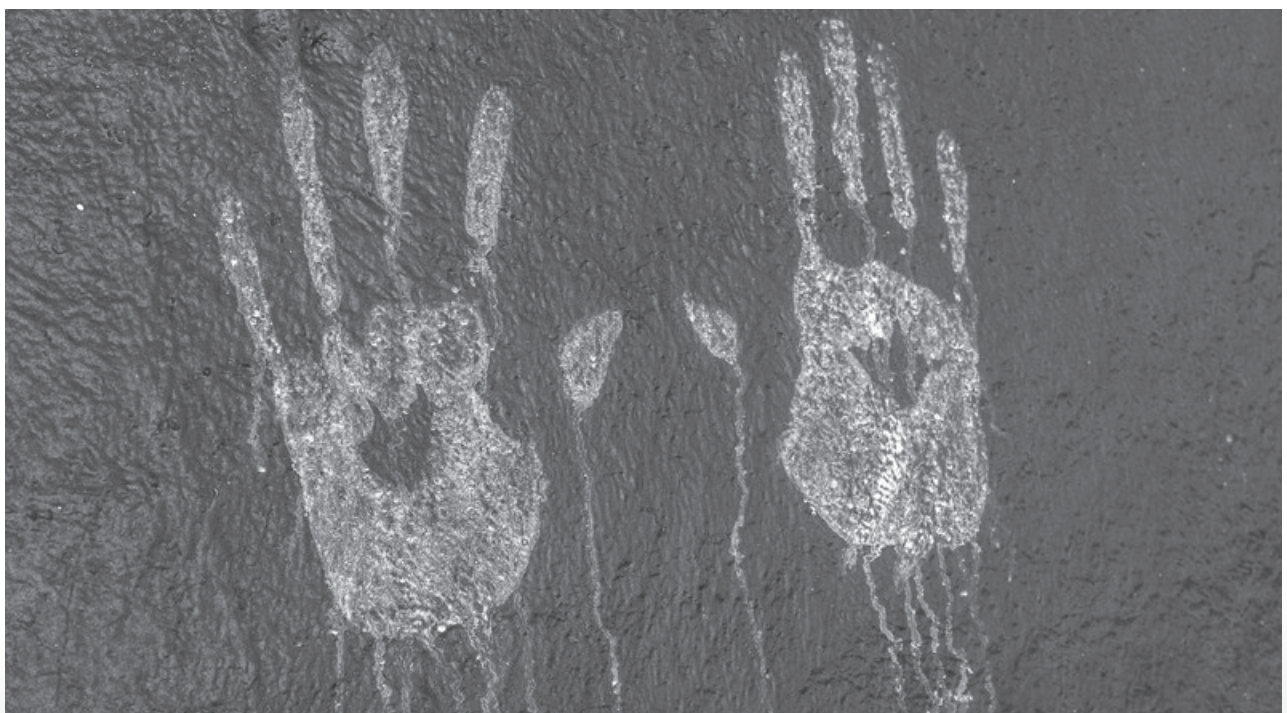
INSIGHTS FROM GENESIS 1

From the Genesis 1 creation narrative, we affirm the following foundations:

FOUNDATION 1:

Man and Woman are created by the same God in communion.

The origin of man and woman, male and female, is God and is in God. Our being and our identity



as man and woman, male and female, is equally, profoundly and wonderfully rooted and founded in God. It is the expressed will and desire of God that both man and woman, male and female, have their beginnings in God's very self and in God's very being. This is a biblical and theological truth that must not and cannot be denied, ignored or explained away. Man as male shall not and must not, therefore, make any claim to superiority. Likewise, woman as female shall not and must not make any claim to inferiority. Any such claim goes against the expressed will and desire of God who created both man and woman. What this means is that any culture or cultural tradition in the Pacific that looks down on woman and on being female is contrary to the expressed will and desire of God and must, therefore, be discarded.

The God who created man and woman is God in relation and in communion. The collective call to "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness ..." (Genesis 1:26a, New Revised Standard Version), reveals two important points that need to be mentioned: first, the words reveal God who is relational and who is in communion; and second, the words reveal plural majesty and divine court. Although the plural words "us" and "our" have been interpreted in various ways, it is right and good to say that divine communion establishes the context within which man and woman relate to God and to each other. To live in communion and community is God's idea in the very first place. For man and woman to live relationally is, therefore, rooted in God in communion. In the cultures of the Pacific, community is highly valued and it embodies aspects of the kingdom or reign of God that Jesus proclaimed. However, in the case where such sense of community involves and condones unequal relationships between male and female, then it goes against the sense of community in God.

FOUNDATION 2:

Man and Woman are created in the image and likeness of God. Woman and Man bear the image of God.

Both man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God. In saying this it is understood that the affirmation does not mean that man and woman are the same as God or are God. God remains God and man and woman remain human, and created in God's image and likeness. The debate as to whether the words "image" and "likeness" mean the same or not, does not invalidate this biblical and theological truth. But what do these theological terms mean? Various shades of meanings have been given and the following three are the most common.¹⁸

- Firstly, image refers to the substantive (from substance) or essential (from essence) nature of God. From this viewpoint, to be created in God's image refers to the capacity and ability given to humans to be able to reason and think, and to use our intellect or mental capacity and ability. It refers to the free will given to human beings. It also refers to spiritual and moral characteristics given to humans such as righteousness and holiness.
- Secondly, image refers to the relational nature of God. The "us" and "our" are relational terms, and both words reveal the relationship within and between plural majesty. From this viewpoint, to be created in God's image is to live in relation to and in communion with the plural majesty. It also means for human beings (women and men) to live in relation to and in relationship with each other. This human to human

¹⁸ For helpful and in-depth discussions of these, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. in 1 vol. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 500-501; J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 25-29. The narrative given here is a rather brief summary of the main points.



relationship is rooted in, and flows out of, the relationship within God and the plural majesty.

- Thirdly, image refers to the creative act of God but especially to the function and responsibility God entrusted to humanity to undertake. This functional understanding of image refers, therefore, to humanity's function to "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth," (Genesis 1:28b, New Revised Standard Version). Moreover, this functional understanding underpins and acknowledges the interrelationship and interconnectedness of human beings and other beings. From this third viewpoint, image does not refer to something that man or woman possesses; rather it refers to the function or responsibility that they are entrusted with to carry out. In all of this, it must be borne in mind and emphasised that the debate about

which of these three main interpretations of image and/or likeness is the more correct one does not invalidate the theological and biblical truth that both man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God.

Since both woman and man are created in the image and likeness of God it must be affirmed that both are also bearers, in equal measure, of the image and likeness of God. However, there are interpretations that say something quite different, and the following two are examples of such interpretations.¹⁹

- One interpretation says that only man is created in the image of God and woman is created in the image of man and, therefore, she bears only the image of man. This interpretation denies completely that woman, being created in God's image, is also bearer of God's image.

¹⁹ Refer to discussions on pp. 11-12.

- Another interpretation says that man is created in the image of God and woman has access to God's image only through the man. It goes further to say that only through being married to a man can a woman have access to God's image through her husband. This interpretation, therefore, strongly implies that a single unmarried woman does not and cannot bear the image of God.

These interpretations have been influenced and propagated through Western philosophy and ideas about man and woman (as stated in the introduction), and easily find entry and acceptance in receptor cultures that already have similar inhuman ideas and views about women, and as a result get embedded into the systems and structures that govern relationships between men and women. In this way the philosophy-bible-culture combination is used to uphold and advance male dominance and superiority, and to justify and perpetuate female subordination and inferiority. Such interpretations must be rejected outright and completely as wrong and unacceptable. Being influenced by Western philosophy and cultures, these interpretations fall into two dangers: they allow ideologies and cultures to take precedence over God's word and will; they fail to "tease out" or "listen for" or discern the word and voice of God from the various words and voices in the Bible. The biblical and theological truth is that man and woman are both created in the image and likeness of God, and both woman and man bear the image of God in equal measure.

FOUNDATION 3:

Man and Woman are Equal before God.

From what has been said above it follows that man and woman are equal in the face of God and in the presence of each other. Woman and man have equal standing, equal status, equal

worth and equal dignity. This equality is not determined by any physical, spiritual, cultural, social, economic, and mental-intellectual qualities or characteristics of man and woman. Rather, it is rooted in and begins with God. Neither the man nor the woman has the right to claim a higher or lower status and place than the other. It is God who established the very same platform and standard for equality of woman and man. Consequently if or when a man tries to claim and justify a status higher or superior than a woman, he is attempting to venture into a realm where God is not, and attempting to establish himself outside God.

FOUNDATION 4:

Man and Woman are both entrusted with the same and equal responsibility to care for the Earth and its constituents.

God's words to "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28b, New Revised Standard Version), were said to both the man and the woman. Woman and man are equally to exercise dominion. However, it is generally men who have tended to have more direct and destructive impacts upon the earth. To have dominion is not the same thing as to dominate, although it is this latter view that has been emphasised and practiced until the 1960s when a more purposeful ecologically-sensitive reading and interpretation of the text began to appear.²⁰ A more appropriate interpretation of the concept of dominion must take into account its usage in other parts of Scripture. From this broader understanding exercising dominion has in mind the following, as pointed out by Gnanakan:²¹ God the Shepherd of

²⁰ A very good example of such eco-sensitive reading of the creation narrative is done by Ken Gnanakan, *God's World: A Theology of the Environment* (London: SPCK, 1999).

²¹ See especially Gnanakan chapter 5 from which these thoughts are drawn.

Israel sanctioned dominion in love as a shepherd loves and cares for his sheep; God created Adam from adamah showed the commonality of the human with his/her environment; God sanctioned dominion with creativity, not for the destruction of nature; dominion is to be exercised in the interest and welfare of others; just as Adam and Eve were commanded to till and keep the garden, dominion is to be exercised in servant-hood; dominion is to be exercised with

journey of creating had turned into an inward journey of joy and satisfaction.²³ Putting God's inner emotions in another way after the work of creating was done, the Exodus rendering says that God "rested, and **was refreshed**," (Exodus 31:17b, New Revised Standard Version, bold italics added). Contrary to theological positions which portray God as immovable and impassable, the accounts of creation in Genesis and in this brief reference to creation in Exodus (31:17),



respect and justice. The Hebrew word *shamar*, which means 'to keep' moves closer to the noun 'steward' or 'trustee' and implies 'watchful care and preservation of the Earth.'²² The point in all this is that the command to exercise dominion was given to both man and woman and man must not act as if he were the sole and superior manager of the earth.

FOUNDATION 5:

Everything that God made was/ is "very good." Woman and Man are both "very good."

The words "very good" give us a brief glimpse of the deep sense of joy, happiness and satisfaction that God experienced. It is as if God, after having completed the work of creating, sits back and looks at the completed work, and a smile of deep contentment covers the face. The outward

clearly show that the work of creating had moved and affected God deeply. God was not only very pleased and full of joy but also, at the completion of the work of creating, was refreshed. Included in the declaration and affirmation of "very good" is the woman and the man! What God has declared "very good" no one has the right to belittle or treat as less good and less important. Thus any man who regards any woman as inferior and says that woman is of lesser good or lesser quality than man is clearly going against God's declaration of woman also as "very good."

INSIGHTS FROM GENESIS 2

Genesis chapter 2 provides an account of God's work of creating that is not exactly the same as that in Genesis chapter 1.²⁴ This does not

²² *ibid.*

²³ Thorwald Lorenzen, *Toward a Culture of Freedom: Reflections on the Ten Commandments Today* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008). See especially his chapter 6 "Celebrating Freedom ... The Fourth Word" pp.68-80.



mean, however, that it contradicts the theological and biblical foundations built from the Genesis 1 account. Quite on the contrary, it supports and affirms the truths set out in chapter 1 as discussed above. From the Genesis 2 creation narrative, we affirm the following foundations:

FOUNDATION 6:

Woman are NOT Subordinate BUT Equivalent to Man.

Traditional and common readings and interpretations of the Genesis 2 creation account tend to place woman as subordinate to man. The text generally describes woman as “helper” to the man, “suitable” for him and is “taken” and “formed” from the rib of the man, which some have interpreted to mean that she is, therefore, subordinate to the man, and that “there was no equality to begin with”²⁴ between the man and woman. Others have argued that equality between the man and woman is a salient theme which underpins the second

creation story.²⁶ It is affirmed here that woman is not subordinate but equal to/with man. In actual fact if anything woman can be said to the saviour of man! According to the story God was concerned, even sad, that the man God created was lonely! God tried to address this situation of loneliness by creating animals and bringing them to the man but this did not work. In order to save the man from loneliness God created the woman and this worked!²⁷ The Hebrew word ‘ezer’ means a superior helper, and is used to refer to God, and kenegdô means saviour! This is why David Freedman said, ‘... God made up for the inadequacy of His original creation of man—an inadequacy that He admits to by saying “It is not good for the man to be alone”—by creating the female of the species, who is intended to be ezer kenegdô, “a power equal to him.”’²⁸ This is supported by Eichler’s conclusion that, “A methodologically rigorous reading of the account of the Woman’s creation reveals a fundamentally egalitarian view of the sexes that is both nuanced and psychologically sensitive.”²⁹ In view of these revelatory and non-traditional interpretations it is affirmed that woman is neither subordinate nor inferior to man but is equal to and with man.

24 For an insightful and scholarly treatment of the differences in the two creation narratives, see Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist’s Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

25 See for instance Jerome Gellman, “Gender and Sexuality in the Garden of Eden”, *Theology and Spirituality* 12:3 (2006): 319-336. Gellman argues further that domination by man over woman is the message of these two chapters.

26 See for instance R. David Freedman, “Woman: A Power Equal to Man – translation of woman as a “fit helpmate” for man is questioned.” *Libronix Digital Library System*, 6/6/2004.

27 This interpretation is argued for by Raanan Eichler, “Gender Equality at Creation,” <http://thetorah.com/gender-equality-at-creation/>.

28 Freedman, “Woman – Power Equal to Man.”

29 Eichler, “Gender Equality at Creation.”

FOUNDATION 7:

Man and Woman both created from the same “stuff”.

In the Genesis 2 account of creation, “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being,” (v.7, NRSV). The Hebrew word that is translated “man” is Adam and the Hebrew word that is translated “ground” is adamah. It is a play of words so that Adam is formed from adamah. Man is therefore intricately and mysteriously connected to the ground.³⁰ In chapter 2 verse 21 God formed the woman: “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh,” (New Revised Standard Version). The majority of English versions of this verse use the word “rib” and unfortunately this has been commonly used as a basis for arguing that woman is formed from man’s bone and, therefore, secondary and inferior to man. However, the Hebrew word (tzalelot, from tsela) that is translated “rib” can also be correctly and equally translated as “side.” Raanan Eichler argues as such: ‘... the preponderance of evidence suggests that the meaning of tsela’ in our account is “side” or “flank.” Elsewhere in the Bible, it almost always refers to a side – of a hill (2 Sam 6:13), of a building (Exod 26:20, 26, 27[x2], 35[x2] ≈ 36:25, 31, 32), or of an object (Exod 25:12[x2] = 37:3[x2]; 27:7 = 38:7; 30:4 = 37:27). Nowhere in the Bible does it refer to an anatomical rib.’³¹ A similar argument is also made by Freedman. Following this view, some versions of the bible have used “side” as the correct translation of tsela, some of which are as follows (all **bold** added):

- “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam; and while he slept, He took one of his ribs or a **part of his side** and

closed up the [place with] flesh,” (Amplified Bible, AMP).

- “So the Lord God caused the man to sleep very deeply [a deep sleep to fall on the man/Adam], and while he was asleep, God removed one of the man’s ribs [**or sides**]. Then God closed up the man’s skin at the place where he took the rib [**or side**],” (Expanded Bible, EB).
- “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took **one of his sides** and closed up the flesh in its place,” (Jubilee Bible 2000, JB 2000).
- “So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was asleep, he took **part of the man’s side** and closed up the place with flesh,” (New English Translation, NET).
- “And Hashem Elohim caused a tardemah (deep sleep) to fall upon the adam, and he slept; and He took from one of his tzalelot (**sides**, ribs), and closed up the basar in the place thereof,” (Orthodox Jewish Bible, OJB).

When the word “rib” is replaced with the word “side” it brings a whole new perspective and meaning to the text. Taking these versions seriously, it is rightly possible to argue that God formed woman literally from half of man. Effectively, then, when the text is read with the word “side” it clearly and truly places woman as being formed from exactly the same stuff as man! Man and woman are to stand and live side-by-side as persons of equal humanity. Only this rendering will then make complete sense and full impact of the man’s acclamation and affirmation in Genesis chapter 2 verse 23:

- “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ...” (NRSV).
- “This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ...” (NET).
- “This is now etzem of my etzem, and basar of my basar ...” (OJB).

³⁰ See James Limburg, “The Responsibility of Royalty: Genesis 1-11 and the Care of the Earth,” *Word and World* 11/2 (1991).

³¹ *ibid*

According to this acclamation the woman is both bone and flesh of the man, not just his bone (or rib). Eichler is convinced that “A responsible reading of the Torah’s second creation account reveals that the Woman is portrayed as more powerful than the Man, as equivalent to him in rank (despite being more powerful), and as being fashioned from half of the Man’s body.”³² Moreover, being formed from exactly the same stuff as man, woman was/is just as perfect a creation as man, and is equally patterned after the image and likeness of God. There is no denying this theological and biblical truth.

FOUNDATION 8:

Woman and Man share the same divine ruach.

Man became a living being when God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” (Genesis 2:7, NET). The Hebrew word ruakh can be translated as breath or spirit or air. Arthur Walker-Jones says that ‘... the same Hebrew word (ruakh) can be translated “breath,” “wind,” or “spirit.”’³³ Hence it is the breath or spirit of God that gave life to the man. This very same breath or spirit also gave life to the woman, who is formed from the side of man. Both the man and woman, therefore, share the same life-giving breath or spirit of God. The spirit of God is one and indivisible so man cannot make any claim to having more of the spirit than woman. In fact the question is not who has more of the spirit of God, but rather who lets the spirit of God have more of him or her. From a broader perspective, indeed the same ruach (spirit, breath, air) gives life to all living creatures (see Psalm 104 especially verses 29-30). In reference to this Psalm Walker-Jones again says that “this is a portrayal of God’s spirit as the life and breath of every creature. God is the spirit of life in all creation.”³⁴ From this

perspective, man and woman and all non-human creatures share the same breath or spirit of life from God.³⁵ This is a theological and biblical truth that must not be denied or ignored, but must be affirmed and allowed to shape the relationships between humanity and between humanity and the non-human creatures.

What the above shows also is that both man and woman are co-sharers and equal participants in the life of God. They are not God but they both share equally in the life of God. Their very being is rooted in God. Both man and woman are the creative work of the spirit and mind and heart and hand of God. They are both equally the handiwork of God.

FOUNDATION 9:

Man and Woman live relationally within wider community as intended by God.

In light of the above, it can be said that it is the vision and desire of God for man and woman to live in relationship and fellowship with one another, with God and with the non-human creatures. This Genesis 2 creation story underpins that truth that human beings live within the context of multiple beings and lives.

- Man and woman are to live as equals with and before each other;
- Man and woman are to live before God as equally made in God’s image and equally bearers of God’s image and equally enlivened by the ruach (Spirit) of God; and,
- Woman and man are to live responsibly and respectfully with all other (non-human) beings which God has created.

³² Ibid

³³ Arthur Walker-Jones, *The Green Psalter: Resources for an Ecological Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 120.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM Press, 1992). Moltmann says, “... experience of the life-giving Spirit in the faith of the heart and in the sociality of love leads of itself beyond the limits of the church to the rediscovery of the same Spirit in nature, in plants, in animals, and in the ecosystem of the earth,” (9-10).



INSIGHTS FROM THE GOSPELS AND EPISTLES

The God who is spoken of in the Old Testament is witnessed to in the New Testament. Christianity believes and affirms that Jesus Christ is both Son of God and Son of Man. He both declared and practiced the central message of the Gospels, namely the Kingdom of God. In the midst of a male-dominated society of his time, and of the theological struggles confronted by the emerging local ecclesia, Paul did his best to contextualise the message of Jesus Christ to his situation – even to the point of being misread, misinterpreted and misunderstood right down to our times. From Jesus, the Gospels and Epistles we affirm the following:

FOUNDATION 10:

The kingdom or reign of God as revealed, taught and practiced by Jesus is the standard for all relationships between women and men.

It is the consensus among scholars of the Bible and theologians that at the centre of the ministry of Jesus was/is the “kingdom of heaven” (Matthew) or “Kingdom of God” (Mark and Luke).³⁷ In one way or another, the three Gospels begin the ministry of Jesus with him (Jesus) making reference to the Kingdom of God:

- Matthew 4 verse 17 ‘From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the

This threefold living-in-relationships is what God intends for the earth. This deep theological insight is highlighted by Moltmann: “... To experience the fellowship of the Spirit inevitably carries Christianity beyond itself into the greater fellowship of all God’s creatures. For the community of creation, in which all created things exist with one another, for one another and in one another, is also the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,³⁶ (*italics original*). Creator God is a relational God – a God who desires communion and interaction with God’s creation. The relationship and communion God intends for humanity is one of equals, and to live as communion of equals is one of the fruits and visible embodiment of the image and likeness of God in humanity.

36 Moltmann, 10.

37 Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 251. Also Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992)

kingdom of heaven has come near,”” (New Revised Standard Version);

- Mark 1 verses 14-15, ‘... Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news,”” (New Revised Standard Version);
- and in a different but descriptive and somewhat programmatic way, Luke 4 verse 18, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour,’ (New Revised Standard Version).

Luke’s version points to the practical and tangible implications and outworkings of the Kingdom of God, which in these theological foundations is understood as the reign of God.

But what did Jesus mean by the reign of God and what does it mean? Various perspectives are provided. Reign of God embodies a vision of the world if God were “king” or “ruler” and all the world’s royalties and rulers were not.³⁸ This is a vision of the world where there is justice and righteousness, repentance and forgiveness, equality and dignity, love and compassion, and a vision where all God’s people experience shalom and abundant life. From this perspective the reign of God is God’s vision, hope, passion and desire for the Earth and its constituents. From the life and teachings of Jesus, several insights on the reign of God are learned:³⁹

- The reign of God calls for a radical (re) centering in God. This centering in God is underpinned and highlighted by Jesus’ call to repentance and to believe in “the good

news.” This call to repentance is rooted in the Old Testament theme of “return” – from exile, and separation and estrangement – to centre again in God.⁴⁰ In the Gospels it is a call for the disciples of Jesus and followers of Jesus in every age, to go beyond society’s ‘business as usual’ mindset and mode of being and to both capture, and be caught in, the vision and good news that a new way of living and a new kind life is (made) possible and available. This new life is the reign of God and what Jesus speaks of according to John’s Gospel as eternal life. In other words, such repentance and re-centering demand a new way of seeing, a new way of thinking, and a new way of doing and engaging in relationships.

- The reign of God presents a new and alternative way of seeing.⁴¹ Sight – being enabled and empowered to see – is a major theme in the ministry of Jesus, especially in his miracles of healing. Sight then becomes a metaphor in the Gospels healing narratives to underpin the good news that a brand new way of seeing God, the world, and seeing one another as equally children of God is possible within the purview of the reign of God. The middle section of the Gospel according to Mark (8:22 – 10:52) for instance exemplifies this so powerfully. This growing capacity to see and recognise God’s reign as declared and practiced by Jesus is likened to the difference between the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26) who at Jesus’ first touch could see people, “but they look like trees, walking,” (8:24), and the healing of blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52) who immediately “regained his sight and followed him [Jesus] on the way,” (10:52). The reign of God is about new sight and perception. As Borg says, “Indeed the very forms of Jesus’s teachings ... are invitations to a different way of seeing. Their function is to bring

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ The following discussions are inspired and adapted from Marcus Borg’s *Jesus*. See also Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003.)

⁴⁰ Borg, especially his discussions on the kingdom of God.

⁴¹ Borg, 195.

about a radical perceptual shift.”⁴² Through his relationships with people considered as lower in rank in society, Jesus demonstrated this new way of seeing such people – including women, children, tax-collectors, and people living with disabilities, etc.

- The reign of God presents a new way of thinking and invites a new frame of mind. In the Gospel according to John, it is to “be born again,” (John 3). In a big way a frame of mind is influenced by, and quite often the product of and imprisoned within, prevailing social, economic, cultural, religious and intellectual processes and values. In the time of Jesus it was Imperial Rome which exercised power over much of these spheres of life. It was an imperial domination system.⁴³ However, the Jewish religious leaders were also granted significant degree of freedom to exercise authority over the religious life and affairs of their people. These leaders controlled and even manipulated access to God and the worship of God. With both the imperial domination system and the religious domination system, a particular frame of mind was being pushed, albeit very subtly in various ways. It was a frame of mind that was confined within the imperially and religiously “right way” of thinking. Through his teachings, the miracles he performed and the life that he lived, Jesus offered an alternative and countercultural frame of mind – a new mental/intellectual vigour propelled with a new framing story, namely the reign of God. This new framing story is captured in Luke’s programmatic introduction to Jesus’ ministry: “to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year

of the Lord’s favour,” (4:18, NRSV), and in John’s bold statement of Jesus’s core mission: “... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly,” (10:10, NRSV). This requires a new frame of mind that shakes free from the repressive, oppressive and dehumanising social, economic, cultural, religious and intellectual shackles which deny people freedom, dignity, shalom and abundant life.⁴⁴

- The reign of God is about a new being-in-relation with people and with God. On the one hand, Jesus welcomed and befriended people who were on the fringes of society, even excluded from society – including women and children, the poor and destitute and those with ill-health. He crossed over socio-economic and cultural, religious and purity barriers and touched the life of the “other” who was perceived as different. He had table fellowships with so-called sinners and outcasts, (such as the story of Zachaeus, Luke 19:1-10), and stood up for those in situations of abuse and sure death such as the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) or the unnamed woman who lavishly anointed him just days before his death (Mark 14:1-9). When he was challenged by a Canaanite woman, he was prepared to change his mind and to experience her world of rejection and exclusion, and attended to her request and healed her son. (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30 refers to the woman as Syrophenician). On the other hand, Jesus was very critical of people in leadership, both religious and political leaders. He challenged the corruption, injustices, double standards and hypocrisy that were rife in the establishments. He had an uneasy and critical relationship with those who were in positions of power and who lorded over the people in ways which ensured that their so-called God-

⁴² Borg, 196.

⁴³ See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

⁴⁴ This is a central idea to liberation theological thinking, which theologians such as Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutierrez, and educationist/philosopher Paulo Freire popularised.

given leadership status was maintained and consolidated while their subjects remained subservient and seemingly without power. The reign of God is about this new being-in-relation:

- a) welcoming, accepting, affirming and being in solidarity with the poor and destitute, those in the margins of society and even excluded by society for one reason or another, those suffering from all forms of injustices and inhumanity, and those whose voices have been silenced or not heard, especially women and children;
 - b) critical and prophetic engagement with those who wield power and influence, and whose immediate interest and objective is neither for the common good nor for the administration of justice, but for the furthering of self-centred interests and individual advancement.
- The reign of God is about giving voice to those without a voice and speaking a new language. Through his acceptance and affirmation of people of low socio-economic status and his standing up for women and children, Jesus and the reign of God which he declared and lived gave and continue to give voice to all such people. His actions and teachings became the strongest and loudest voice for and on behalf of all such people, and the harshest critique of those in power and of the systems that put them in those positions of power. Through the message of the reign of God that he taught and lived many people have found a voice – a voice of resistance and hope. The reign of God is also about speaking a new language. This is the language that confronts and challenges the status quo, and the language that speaks truth to power. It is the prophetic language and is counter-cultural. In perhaps some of the hardest words attributed to Jesus by the Gospel writers, he describes certain religious leaders as hypocrites, whitewashed walls, and blind guides of the blind. At the same time, it is also a language that advocates and speaks up for justice; a language that affirms human dignity; a language that is inclusive and clearly was and is meant to empower those deemed without power, such as women and children and people living with disabilities; and a language that embodies a future where humankind experiences abundant life and shalom.
 - The reign of God is about a world with new and transformed relationships. It is about a world in which people see and relate to each other as children of God who are all bearers of the image of God; a world in which relationships between people are built upon and nurtured through repentance and forgiveness, love and compassion, justice and righteousness, equality and dignity, respect and acceptance, and sharing and reciprocity; a world where all people live in God's freedom and without fear, and live instead to the fullest potential that God intends for every person; a world where humanity lives and walks lightly, responsibly and accountably on the Earth. It is the vision of the world where nations and peoples, "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks ... [and] nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore," (Isaiah 2:4, NRSV), and a world where, "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them," (Isaiah 11:6 NRSV). In other words, it is a world that is healed and transformed, and a world in which all people enjoy shalom and share abundant life.
 - Finally, but not the least, the reign of God is for the Earth. It is for the Earth both now and in its becoming as God continues



to work with/through human beings toward the eschaton and the Earth's new beginning. The prayer Jesus taught his disciples, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," (Matthew 6:10, NRSV), reveals that it is the will of God that God's kingdom is on Earth "as it is in heaven." Biblically the "heaven" is where God is, so put simply, God's presence and God's reign is for the Earth. The "parables of the kingdom" in the Gospel according to Matthew (chapter 13), all portray the reign of God as for the Earth and from the Earth. All the images that Jesus uses in the parables – seeds, weeds, wheat, mustard seed, earth/ground/field, yeast, flour, woman, home, treasure in the field, pearls, merchant, net, sea, fish, etc. – are all Earth based and grow and rise from the Earth, with its colours and contrast. The subtle, and usually unmentioned, central message in these parables is that the reign of God is proclaimed and described by Jesus in the symbolic language of Earth. Renowned bible scholar and theologian Walter Wink (1992, 115) describes this truth evocatively and powerfully:

In parable after parable, Jesus speaks of the "reigning of God," using images drawn from farming and women's work. It is not described as coming from on high down to earth; it rises quietly and imperceptibly out of the land. It is established, not by armies and military might, but by an ineluctable process of growth from below, among the common people. Its colours are not gold and scarlet and purple, but earth tones: brown, yellow, and green [and blue]. Its symbolism is not masculine (kings, swords, chargers, shields, spears) but feminine (water, soil, dough, women, a home)."



This view and understanding of the reign of God resonates with the Old Testament vision of God's reign where salvation and righteousness, or justice, germinate and grow from the Earth: 'Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also; I the Lord have created it,' (Isaiah 88:8, NRSV). Heaven and Earth, or God and humanity and all Earth's constituents, combine and the goal is that salvation and righteousness or justice spring forth from and flourish on Earth.⁴⁵ 'Let the earth open' is indicative of the life-generating and life-affirming power of the Earth.⁴⁶ The view and understanding of God's reign described in the parables by Jesus, and grounded in the Old Testament vision, makes human beings participants and co-workers with God in realising God's reign on Earth. Human beings are partners and co-workers with God in realising God's reign on Earth. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, 'We, without God, cannot; God without us, will not.'⁴⁷

Jesus, the herald of the good news of God, is spoken of in the Gospels as Son of God and Son of Man. Jesus teaches and demonstrates to humanity what it is and what it means to know God. He reveals who God is in a fuller way, like never before, and unfolds God's vision for humanity and for the Earth. At the same time, as Son of Man, Jesus reveals and demonstrates what it means to be human in a fuller way. Through his humanity, Jesus opens for all people what it means to live and relate to one another as children of God and as people created in the image of God. Thus to be Christ-like is to grow toward a fuller realisation and sense of our common humanity and true human potential, and from this new vantage point to relate to one another in the ways demonstrated by Jesus Christ.

FOUNDATION 11:

Women ARE Accepted, Affirmed, Uplifted and EMPOWERED in the Reign of God.

Within Jesus' vision of God's reign, women are seen and treated as having equal dignity and importance as men. In a society and at a time where women were seen and treated as objects and properties of men, and their importance was primarily attached only to bearing children

45 A similar vision is captured in Psalm 85:10-11, 'Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky,' (NRSV)

46 This does not deny the fact that the Earth also has the power to negate and even destroy life. It means to say and affirm that God's vision for the Earth are noble – to give abundant life and shalom, and for justice and salvation to prevail.

47 "Tutu stresses justice, mercy, humility in remarks to students." See <http://across.co.nz/TutuSpeaks2Students.htm>, cited 01/04/15. This is a paraphrase of St Augustine's famous words, "Without God, man cannot. Without man, God will not."

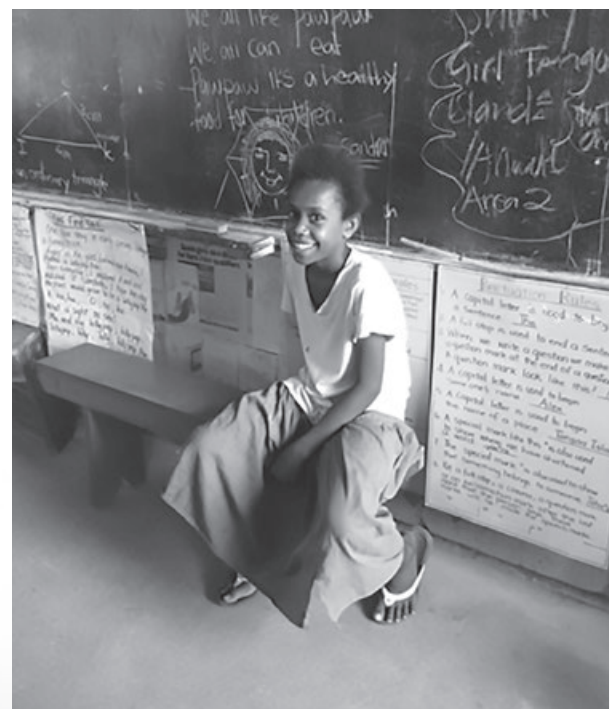


and the home, this was very radical and countercultural. Jesus accepted, affirmed and uplifted women, and by so-doing empowered them. He was sensitive to the insurmountable and burdensome cultural, socio-economic, legal and religious hurdles and handicaps with which they had to struggle. He showed them compassion whenever and wherever he had the opportunity. In numerous Gospel narratives Jesus met a woman, talked about a woman, or mentioned a woman in a parable. Some examples are as follows:⁴⁸

- The story of the widow of Nain whose only son has died (Luke 7:11-17). Moved with compassion at her loss, and knowing that any real prospect she had was now practically gone without any male relative to care for her, Jesus brought her dead son back to life and thus restored what life and future she had left as a widow.
- The story of an unnamed woman (Luke 7:36-50) who came into an all-male banquet, knelt, wept over Jesus' feet, bathing them with her tears, and then anointed them with perfume before drying them with her hair. To the disgust and

disbelief of his host and his exclusively male friends Jesus entertained and affirmed and justified her actions and forgave her sins.

- The story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38). Martha chose to offer hospitality to their guest and Mary chose to sit before Jesus to listen to what he was saying. The story is about choices. Jesus affirmed what Mary chose to do, and clearly did not rubbish or reject what Martha chose to do. Both listening and doing, receiving God's Word



48 Adapted from the article by Doug Clark, "Jesus and Women," http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200102/024_jesus_and_women.cfm

and serving others, are vital to the Christian life, just as inhaling and exhaling are to breathing.

- The story of the crippled woman whom Jesus healed in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17). She had everything against her: she was a woman; she was crippled for over eighteen years; she was “bent over” and her world was below the knees of everyone; the place she went to (the synagogue) was a man’s world; and organised religion was against her. Jesus welcomed her and healed her on the Sabbath, and called her a daughter of Abraham. He set her free and empowered her.
- The story of the widows offering (Luke 21:1-4). The poor widow gave the only two small copper coins she had to live on in the offering basket compared to big amounts the rich people put in, with more to spare. Jesus commendation of the widow was at the same time, and more so, a rebuke and critique of the people, systems and structures that made her poor and kept her in poverty. In a subtle way he spoke against the injustices that resulted in her condition of being poor.
- The story of the woman caught in the act of committing adultery (John 8:1-11). She was “caught in very act of committing adultery” and was brought by her accusers to Jesus and were about to stone her. They did not bring the man with whom she committed adultery. Jesus stood up for her and challenged anyone of her accusers who was without sin to cast the first stone. Jesus defended her instead of condemning her, and encouraged her to “not sin again,” and by so-doing empowered her.
- The story of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). A descendent of the enemies of God and enemies of the Jews, she asked for Jesus’ help to cure her sick daughter. Apparently aware of such historical enmity

and friction Jesus did not respond to her positively initially, stressing his mission priority to “the house of Israel,” and upon her insistence said to her, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She responded “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Deeply impressed and touched by her great faith, Jesus healed her daughter. Clearly Jesus changed his mind – or in other words he was converted by her⁴⁹ – and helped the woman with her daughter. In Matthew’s underpinning theological narrative, the historical enmity between Canaanites and Israelites (Jews) was now reversed and healing had come, and central to this transformation was the unnamed Canaanite woman.

FOUNDATION 12:

Women as Equal Participants and Partners in the Reign of God.

Jesus’ sense of being a man was never threatened by the presence of a woman. He spoke to women both in public and private, and indeed he learned from them. For instance, when he was challenged by the Canaanite woman he decided to change his mind.⁵⁰ He learned from her about deep faith and love for a family member. No rabbi of his day included women among his disciples, but Luke said that Jesus included women in his circle of followers (Luke 8:1-3; 23:55-56; 24:10) – even women who were described and perceived as sinners and demon-possessed. Matthew and Mark also record that there were many women who followed Jesus starting from very early on during his ministry.

49 See the interesting article by Grant LeMarquand, “The Canaanite Conquest of Jesus (Mt 15:21-28).” See original file <https://www.tsm.edu/sites/default/files/Faculty%20Writings/LeMarquand%20-%20The%20Canaanite%20Conquest%20of%20Jesus.pdf>.

50 Refer footnote 46 above.



These women supported and served Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. They too were in service to the kingdom along with Jesus and the twelve. Women ministered to Jesus in unique ways and remained faithful to him during his life, even during his passion and death when Peter denied him and his male disciples deserted him.

In several passages in the Gospels, certain women are presented as “first” in very important events. Elizabeth was the first to be informed of the soon-to-be born Jesus the Son of God; prophetess Anna is mentioned together with Simeon as the first to bless Jesus at the Temple; Martha was the first to declare Jesus as Messiah and Son of God; a group of women were the first to find out about the empty tomb and the first to be told of the resurrection of Jesus, and were amongst the first to announce this news of the resurrection of Jesus; Mary Magdalene – the constant female disciple in all four Gospels – was the first to whom Jesus revealed himself at his resurrection, and the first who was commissioned by the risen Christ to proclaim the resurrection. As a result, later tradition will herald

her as “the apostle to the apostles.”⁵¹ In other words, women are presented in the Gospels as participants, partners and co-workers within the reign of God that Jesus preached and lived. The reign of God is the greatest leveller of all time.

FOUNDATION 13:

Women Share Equally the Abundant Life Offered by Jesus.

Central to the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus is abundant life or fullness of life: “The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest,” (John 10:10, Common English Bible, CEB). This life is offered to each and every person without exception or discrimination, and this includes women and girls. The general tendency is to interpret life (Greek *zoe*) in a spiritualistic sense, that is, it means “spiritual life.” However, a more appropriate and contextual

⁵¹ Karen L. King, “Women in Ancient Christianity: The New Discoveries.” See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/women.html>, cited 07-04-15

analysis highlights that the Greek word 'zoe' has three primary uses:⁵²

- Ones means of life, i.e., livelihood
- Life or existence itself
- Lifestyle

The well-known theologian Rudolph Bultmann says the following: "zoe denotes in Greek the physical vitality of organic beings, animals, men [sic] and also plants. Life is understood, not as a thing, but as vitality, as the nature or manner which characterizes all living creatures as such."⁵³ The abundant life that Jesus speaks of is much more than just spiritual life; it has to do with all of life in its entirety and includes all that makes life worth the living. Abundant life is about the wholeness of life and involves healthy relationships with God and people and the web of land-sea-atmosphere. In the context of the Pacific Islands the theology of the interconnectedness of life speaks of this view of the wholeness of life.⁵⁴ However, in practical terms abundant life also has to do with the tangible and seemingly mundane facts and issues of life, such as:⁵⁵

- Food
- Clean water
- Shelter (a home)/safety
- Education
- Meaningful work (just wages)
- Freedom to make (informed) choices
- Leisure time
- Inclusion and participation
- Health
- Dignity and Respect. However, in saying this, it needs to be borne in mind that

respect here does not mean being culturally or situationally silent in the face of injustices and abuse. Certainly it does not mean the culture of silence! Respect must be earned by the one being respected; it must not be given any cost to the one who gives such respect to another. Respect must be shown to be mutual and reciprocal, not one-way only.

To deny any woman, man, girl or boy access to one or all of these basic necessities for reason of his/her sex and gender is contrary to God's intentions for humanity and hinders the fullness of the whole community.

FOUNDATION 14:

Women are Equal Members of the Body of Christ.

Women and men are created equal and are equal in the reign of God as proclaimed and lived out by Jesus. In the New Testament, particularly in Acts and the Epistles, followers of the risen Christ gathered in fellowship groups that later became known as 'ecclesia'. Various images are used to describe this new development, the common and well known one being the Body of Christ, and those within it – men and women – are all called members of the Body. It follows that men and women are equal within the Body of Christ, the Church: "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, NRSV). In Christ every member within the Body is one and all are equal. However, oneness and equality does not mean sameness. In fact, all members of the Body are different, with different gifts and talents, but all of these are intended for the building up of the Body:

"4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same

52 See Zoe at http://www.wenstrom.org/downloads/written/word_studies/greek/zoe.pdf.

53 Quoted from Zoe at http://www.wenstrom.org/downloads/written/word_studies/greek/zoe.pdf

54 This theology of interconnectedness of life popularised by theologians such as Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, Vanua (1992, 2002); Ama'amalele Tofaeono, AIGA (2000); Winston Halapua, *Waves of God's Embrace* (2007), etc.

55 See Seforosa Carroll, "Church Partnership Programme Forum," PowerPoint Presentation, Madang, Papua New Guinea, October 2014.

Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” (1 Corinthians 12: 4-7, English Standard Version, ESV).

God through the Spirit gives gifts to all men and women, male and female, without discrimination or preferences, and all the gifts though different for different purposes are equally important. In Paul’s analogy of the Church as Body in 1 Corinthians 12 the hand is just as important and necessary as the foot and their functions, or the nose is just as important and necessary as the mouth and their functions, and so on. It is society and culture that choose and determine the limitations and/or expectations that are placed on people based on gender or other points of distinction. These are neither biblical nor theological and fly in the face of God’s Kingdom and Reign as declared and practiced by Jesus the Son of Joseph and Mary, and of God through them. Any theology or teaching or practice of the Body of Christ which states or even suggests that women are less than equal to men, or that women are gifted less than men, or that all women are less suited for leadership than men, run counter to God’s intentions for the Church and must be challenged and changed.

FOUNDATION 15:

Husband and Wife are to Mutually Submit to One Another.

The Kingdom of God declared by and practiced by Jesus Christ is the greatest leveller of all time. In the Kingdom of God women, men, boys and girls stand on level ground shoulder to shoulder as persons created equally in God’s image and endowed with dignity. Followers of Jesus see and relate to each other from the vantage point

of God’s Kingdom where mutuality in human relationships is a Christian imperative: loved and loving, forgiven and forgiving, accepted and accepting, reconciled and reconciling, respected and respecting, healed and healing, and so on.

From Ephesians 5:21-32 mutual submission between members of the Body of Christ in the context of church life and worship is practiced out of their reverence for Christ.⁵⁶ In Paul’s theology this mutuality in relationships is meant to flow outward to the home where husbands and wives submit to one another out of reverence for Christ as equal members and partners in Christ’s Body. This also demonstrates their love, commitment and respect for each other. It follows that in the context of this mutual relationship between husband and wife, neither the husband nor the wife has any God-given marital right to commit any form of violence on the other. In particular, no husband or any man has any God-given marital right to commit violence on his wife or on a woman based on culture or belief or interpretation of Scriptures. Within the context of marriage relationship, submission is not demanded either by the husband or the wife, but both husband and wife choose to freely and willingly offer it out of love and respect for each other.

Mutuality in relationships recognises that members of the Body of Christ, that is the church, are blessed with distinct yet equally important and necessary gifts of the Holy Spirit. Such gifts are purposely for the building up of Christ’s Body the Church. On the home-front, in contexts where wifely submission and husband headship/leadership are the cultural norms, such as in most cultures in the Pacific, mutual submission between husband and wife is countercultural in that both husband and wife are co-leaders of/in the family. Countercultural does not mean anti-cultural! It means simply being

⁵⁶ The ideas and views presented in this section are adapted from the excellent doctoral thesis by Lisa Marie Belz, “The Rhetoric of Gender in the Household of God: Ephesians 5:21-33 and Its Place in Pauline Tradition,” (PhD thesis, Loyola University Chicago, 2013)

aware of what is not humane or godly in any culture and to counter it, and offer an alternative that is better and more humane. Jesus the Son of God did a lot of this during his public ministry. His “Sermon on the Mount” or “the Beatitudes” exemplify what being countercultural means. Followers of Jesus Christ today are called to be countercultural!

In the home-front, both husband and wife have God-given talents and skills that must be used interchangeably for the building up and welfare of the home. Based on the gifts, talents, skills and knowledge that they have they choose freely - without any form of coercion or violence - to carry out needed tasks in the home to their very best potential so that the family in its entirety is built up and every member enjoys abundant life. What this means is that any form of violence committed by a husband against his wife based on culture or belief or interpretation of Scripture goes against God’s intentions for the family/home and must be condemned.

CONCLUSION

To be human is the birthright of each and every person who was/is/will be born into God’s world. This common humanity begins with God and shares in the life of God. Man and woman (male and female) are made in the image of God; both bear the image of God in equal measure. Being a female and being a male is part and parcel of being human, and both are divine gifts to be celebrated and affirmed. This gift to be human is not the privilege of any culture or context, and is not for any culture or context to deny or even to give. It is given only by God without favouritism, bias or discrimination. All of these establish the foundations upon which humanity relates to God, to one another and to the rest of creation. Any philosophy, culture, theology and biblical interpretation that deny any of these truths must be condemned and rejected.

Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary and of God declared and embodied the vision and desire of God for all human relationships, namely the Kingdom of God. He not only announced and taught the people concerning this kingdom, but also practiced it during his earthly life and ministry. This Kingdom of God is not just for some time into the future. It is for both now and the future, for whatever we do today to work toward realising the equality between men and women and elevating human dignity, already points to the future which God has in mind for all humanity and creation – one of shalom and abundant life for all. Jesus Christ, through his teachings, miracles and life, has again lifted the place of women to where God had intended from the beginning – that is, alongside men and NOT AND NO LONGER beneath men. He defended the woman caught in adultery; he offered abundant life to all – both women and men; he gave hope and a future to the widow of Nain; he elevated the so-called sinful woman who washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair to the level of a teacher; he allowed himself to be corrected and converted by the Canaanite Woman; he entrusted women with the unprecedented message of his resurrection, etc. The Kingdom of God is the greatest leveller of all time!

Christianity declares Jesus Christ as Lord and Head of his Body the Church. In Christ all men and women are equal, and the Church as the visible Body of Christ must live up to its very nature and calling and affirm the equality and dignity of women and men in the church and in the home, not simply in words but more-so in actions. The Church as the Body of Christ is called upon to see and ensure that such equality and dignity is lived out and practiced in every aspect of life and living in the home, church and wider society. As Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “... May your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven ...” so let us strive toward an increasing and fuller realisation of God’s vision and desire for all human relationships on earth. Let us see and relate to one another as equals in God.



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UnitingWorld, PO Box A2266, Sydney South NSW 1235 e: info@unitingworld.org.au t: (02) 8267 4267

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