

Created in God's Image
From Hierarchy to Partnership



Workbook for Participants

Created in God's Image:

From Hierarchy to Partnership

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Introduction

Created in God's Image: From Hierarchy to Partnership is a Church Manual for Gender Awareness and Leadership Development which has been developed as a tool for enabling partnership of women and men. It has been developed with a sociological and theological framework and contains a facilitator's guide, eight training modules, a glossary and is accompanied by a Workbook for Participants. Study of the Bible is an important ingredient and this was developed especially to bring the faith perspective to gender awareness and leadership development. *Created in God's Image: From Hierarchy to Partnership* is a helpful guide for organizing workshops on gender awareness and leadership development which are aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge of gender and gender relations among women and men within the church and wider community and modelling new forms of leadership. The overall goal of the manual and the accompanying workbook is to contribute to critical work in building equal and just partnerships of women and men within the church, its communities and the larger society.

The manual is divided into the following sections:

Section I provides the theoretical and theological framework for the manual. It offers preparatory reading materials for facilitators and other resource persons to enhance their understanding of the concept of gender and of struggles within the church and wider society to advance the status of women. The concept of partnership of women and men is also explored.

Section II is a facilitator's guide to help facilitators and resource persons prepare for their roles as workshop leaders. This guide offers suggestions on how to use the various modules and activities in a workshop. It also refers to the content in the workbook as resource material for each activity.

Section III contains eight training modules consisting of an introduction, a description, objectives, notes to the facilitator, the time needed, activities including Bible studies, and a list of the handouts to be found in the workbook.

Section IV provides additional resources including a glossary of concepts used in the manual. Users are strongly encouraged to add materials – including articles, data, cartoons, media clippings, etc. and words and concepts –

relevant to the local context in which they use this manual.

Workbook for Participants

The *Workbook for Participants* was introduced as a result of an international workshop to test the draft manual. Participants in the “testing” workshop opined that a resource handbook would be useful and could offer significant support to participants as well as facilitators. The workbook is an accompaniment to the eight modules in Section III of the manual and consists of useful resources that have been developed especially for the workshops but can also be used as resource materials beyond the workshops. Church congregations, schools, community groups and others who are involved in gender and development can use the resource materials contained in the workbook.

The Workbook for Participants is organized into two parts:

Part I: Resources for gender sensitivity

These are handouts with fact sheets, explanations of concepts, definitions, illustrations and other relevant information to help with the discussions on issues, concepts and analysis in the modules. Part I also contains stories/case studies and a script for a drama presentation.

Part II: Bible study resources

These are handouts for the Bible study activities within each module. The Bible study handouts contain background, commentaries and reflections on biblical texts and aids for activities. This can also be of additional value to pastors, leaders of Bible studies and to various groups within the church and the wider community. It is important that persons who use

materials from Part II read the introduction entitled *Creating the Bible studies: A brief overview of the methodology used* on page 69.

The workbook serves as an important resource for facilitators and participants. The resources within this workbook can also be used for purposes other than the activities in the workshop; for example, the Bible resources can be used for Bible studies and for preparing sermons.

How to use the Workbook for Participants

The facilitator should decide how the handouts in the workbook are to be distributed and used. One option is to reproduce the whole workbook for distribution to participants. Another option is to photocopy the required handouts within the workbook ahead of time and distribute them when appropriate and necessary. It is important that the facilitator reads the relevant handouts in the workbook as she/he studies the modules. The notes to the facilitator included in each module and for each activity offer guidelines for the use of handouts within each activity.

The facilitator is encouraged to add local resources including stories, newspaper clippings, videos and updated information to the contents of the *Workbook for Participants* as is relevant to the workshops. The language and communication style can be adjusted to suit the context and participants. Please refer to the facilitator’s guide in Section II of the manual for further guidelines in using the *Workbook for Participants*.

Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth
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Acknowledgement

The *Workbook for Participants* has been coordinated and edited by a staff team of the Department of Partnership of Women and Men in collaboration with the Communications office of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. This team includes Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, Terry Angleys, Margaret Richard and Karin Wisniewski.

We would like to say a special word of thanks to the international team who tested the manual. The members of this team were: Ms Lydia Aku Adajawah, Ghana; Rev. Szilardka-Kata Baczoni, Romania; Rev. Margaret Downer, Jamaica; Ms Margrit Leuenberger, Switzerland; Ms Diana Mavunduse, Zimbabwe; Ms Molly Minoo, Guyana; Ms Dorine van Teeseling, Netherlands; and Mr Jason Singh, India. The workshop facilitators and review team were Bishop Albert Bowa, Zambia; Ms Corazon Tabing Reyes, Philippines; Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, India; Ms Chandra Budhu, Guyana/Canada; and Rev. Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, Guyana/Geneva.

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Chandra Budhu and Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth for developing the resource material in Part I.

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Olivia Masih White for her article on *Adam and Eve*.

Part I

Resources for gender sensitivity

Module

Handout I-1

Ground rules: Creating a supportive learning environment

The following are suggestions to help establish a learner-friendly environment:

- Everyone will contribute to a safe and non-judgmental learning environment.
- Everyone will be responsible for her/his own learning and interaction with others.
- Participants will bring analytical skills and personal experience to a shared learning process.
- Everyone will try to participate fully in all activities.
- Everyone's opinions and input – including diverse perspectives – will be valued and respected.
- Comments and feedback will be given in a constructive and supportive way.
- The role of the workshop leader will be that of a workshop facilitator.
- Confidentiality will be respected.
- Participants will try to keep from having side conversations which are disruptive to the process. Everyone can learn when concerns, suggestions, different opinions, etc. are expressed to the whole group.
- In case of serious disagreements, participants will agree to use a process to resolve such situations. For example, participants can develop a list of issues to be resolved later in the workshop and ensure that the points of disagreement are addressed.
- Participants will be punctual and activities will start on time.



Module 2

Handout IIa-1

Valuing the girl child

Girls around the world face numerous challenges throughout their lives because of their gender. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China in 1995, attention was focused on the conditions, needs and rights of girls and they were given special consideration in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at this meeting. However, despite this global attention, the girl child continues to face discrimination from the very early stages of her life. The following provides a brief overview of this discrimination.

Culture and female foeticide

In many parts of India, China and other countries, the cultural preference for sons rather than daughters has resulted in a decline of birth rates for girl babies. For many years, there have been reports of baby girls being neglected, malnourished or even killed at birth. Now with the increasing availability of prenatal screening techniques, female foeticide has vastly increased. Cultural reasons include the strain on families to meet traditional expectations such as dowries on marriage and the preference for boys to carry on family names and properties.

One of the major reasons for female foeticide in India, for example, is the inability of parents to fulfil dowry obligations for their daughters. This is a cultural practice in some South Asian countries. Girls are often seen as a burden because their virginity has to be protected. Parents also need large sums of money for wedding dowries. Some people say they need boys to carry on the family name, whereas girls leave to join their husband's families. It is through the son that the family name outside the home is carried on. Others say a father needs a son to light his funeral pyre when he dies. The girl baby is therefore the unwanted child.

Economic exploitation of girls

- The International Labour Office (ILO) estimates that worldwide over 250 million children aged 5-14 years are driven into child labour¹. Nearly 50% are working full time, and many are doing work that is hazardous and exploitative.
- Girls' work is mainly in the informal sector and is hidden, undervalued and uncounted, making it difficult to address this problem.
- Millions of girls work in domestic service in the homes of other families. This can be the most exploitative form of child labour ranging from long hours to physical abuse.

¹ Ratification of the New Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, International Labour Organization, April 2000.

Module

- The nature and burden of girls' labour, confining them largely to the domestic sphere, restricts their mobility and impedes their healthy growth and development.
- The demand for young girls as prostitutes has grown rapidly because of the fear of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Education and the girl child

- An estimated 140 million children worldwide still do not attend school, two-thirds of whom are girls.
- Gender bias in education, from teachers' attitudes to materials and curricula, works against girls receiving a fair education.
- Child labour keeps girls out of schools. Girls are often kept at home to look after younger siblings or to allow resources to be used for boys to attend school.
- The prevailing attitude is that girls do not need school, thus depriving them of educational opportunities.
- An estimated 15 million girls aged 15-19 give birth each year – early marriages and teenage pregnancies contribute to poor performance in school or to leaving school at a young age.

Module 2

Handout Ila-2

Words that stereotype women and men

The following lists provide examples of stereotypes of women and men.

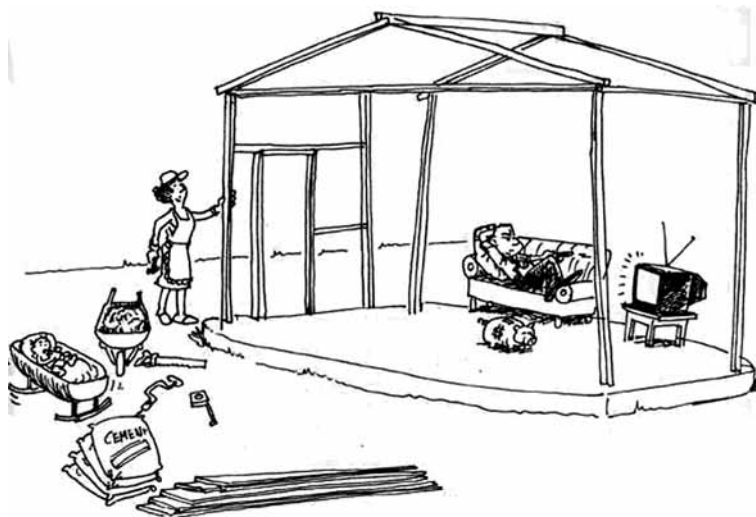
Women are:

Weak
Housewives
Emotional
Nurturing
Gentle
Followers
Caring
Delicate
Fearful
Aggressive
Old maids
Hysterical

Men are:

Strong
Breadwinners
Rational
Decision-makers
Assertive
Leaders
Forceful
Strong
Brave
Competitive
Bachelors
Calm

Add others, in the local language of participants if their mother tongue is not English. Delete any examples that are not relevant to your community.



Module Handout Ila-3

Adam and Eve

Women and men: Biological and genetic similarities and differences

Our first lesson about Adam and Eve, or men and women, starts in Genesis 1.27 *“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”* God’s own image is described as male and female. In God’s eyes there was no difference between them. The Bible affirms God’s perception of the equality of women and men. As time went on society and culture created their own understandings of women and men which resulted in the creation of a wide gap between the role and expectations of women and men. Patriarchal society paid little or no attention to the rights of women. How does the modern generation, living in this 21st century, view women and men? What labels are assigned to them?

Sociology, biology and genetics help to shed some light on how science describes women and men. Women and men are different in their biological make-up. There are sexual differences that separate women from men and they also develop and mature differently. Women and men also have different reproductive roles.

According to biological science, the body is made up of billions of cells. A cell is the smallest unit of life. Every cell is alike and possesses all the genes and is capable of the same functions. Each cell has 23 pairs of thread-like structures known as chromosomes. In women and men 22 pairs are exactly identical, the

23rd pair in men has one X and one Y while in women the 23rd pair has two X chromosomes. A normal male has 46 XY chromosomes and a female has 46 XX chromosomes. The sex of a baby is determined by the presence or absence of a Y chromosome. These chromosomes are the place where the genes are located. Genes partly determine what we are and who we are. They control all our biological functions. The Y chromosome is the smallest chromosome and has only a few genes, less than 10, most of which are involved in the development of males. In the absence of a Y chromosome the fertilized egg always develops into a female. When the Y chromosome is present, the fertilized egg develops into a male foetus because of the few genes located on the Y chromosome. These genes prevent the development of a fertilized egg into a female and stimulate the development of a male. So it is the Y chromosome that is responsible for the determination of the sex. This difference is what we refer to as the gonadal difference.

Genetics is a very new field of study and most lay women and men are not knowledgeable of the genetic nature of the living organism. In humans, 99.9 % of the genes are the same in everyone. This means that there is a great degree of similarity among people of all ethnic groups, races, gender, class and caste. There are very few genes, less than 0.1% to be exact, that determine our sex, colour of skin, facial features, etc. Homology (similarity) of 99.9% between women and men means we are genet-

Module

ically similar. This similarity needs to be celebrated because it tells us that we belong to one human family.

So biology tells us that the bodies of women and men are made differently and that these differences restrict us to certain functions that are exclusively for females or exclusively for males. But biology at the same time tells us that we are more similar than we are different. Both females and males have the capacity to use their minds, raise and care for children, cook, clean and so on.

The study of the biological sciences in previous years adopted a systematic approach and living organisms were divided into categories, such as mammals, reptiles, birds, fishes, etc., based on their major differences. This approach has been improved upon and updated by a technology which examines the microscopic nature of cells and its building blocks. This new revelation and other developing modern technologies have led to a paradigm shift. Now biology education starts with the similarities which are far more important than the differences.



Module Handout Ila-4

Defining gender and sex

The word “gender” is often used as another word for “sex” and **both** women and men generally accept it to mean being female. This misunderstanding combines our socially-defined roles with our biological roles, leading to commonly held views of women as having only natural “womanly” traits associated with nurturing and caring roles. This description is often used to justify the inferior economic, political and social status of women. It is therefore important to clarify the distinction between “gender” and “sex”.

“**Sex**” refers to the biological differences between women and men. Human beings are either born male or female. “Sex” explains important, but limited, differences between women and men, such as the ability to bear children, breastfeed and impregnate. (See handout Ila-3.)

“**Gender**” describes the socially-constructed identities, roles and expectations assigned to women and men. These socially-defined differences between women and men are based on deeply-held societal values and beliefs which are biased and unjust. By understanding gender as a socially constructed relationship between women and men, the possibility of changing the nature of male-female relations becomes evident. Attitudes and behaviour related to gender are learned and can therefore be unlearned.

Examples of gender differences

Political: Leadership/decision-making roles:

Most public institutions – political, religious, economic and social – tend to support men in leadership and decision-making roles, while women in public institutions tend to fill positions more related to their nurturing and caring roles. Women are more likely to be involved at the service rather than the leadership level in local community activities.



Module 2

Social: Men are regarded as heads of households and chief breadwinners, while women are seen as mothers, homemakers and caretakers. This view persists despite the fact that in many parts of the world, there is a growing number of women engaged in paid work outside the home and as heads of households.

Religious: Traditional values and beliefs limit women's access to leadership and decision-making roles in most religious institutions. Gender bias in church hierarchy also works to deny women equal access to leadership positions. The interpretations of biblical text are often used to legitimize and limit the roles of women within the church.

Economic: Women and men access economic benefits unequally. While men are more likely to access, own and control financial and other resources, such as land, credit and loans, women face difficult battles to gain similar economic access. Men have access to higher-paid work while women are more likely to be engaged in work that is an extension of their domestic roles, undercounted and underpaid.

Cultural: Women and men face different and unequal cultural challenges and opportunities. In some countries it is the norm for women to require the permission of male relatives to enjoy freedom of movement. Gender-based abuse and violence, culturally accepted in some societies, prevent women from enjoying personal liberties and full citizenship. In some cases girls are denied the opportunity of education because of their sex.

Module

Handout IIb-1

Counting women's work ²

- ☞ Women's work in the home and society is unvalued and devalued, and women are unwaged and low-waged.
- ☞ Women give birth to, raise and care for all the people of the world, ensuring the survival of every community in every country.
- ☞ Wealth and profit come from women's work and the work of the people to whom they give birth.
- ☞ Yet women's values, experiences and knowledge about human survival and welfare are dismissed, and the brutal values of the global market are imposed and celebrated.

Women contribute to nation-building daily and in numerous ways, including:

- managing households: food preparation, cooking, cleaning, sewing, washing, etc
- producing food: farming, fishing, kitchen garden, poultry, pig and cattle rearing
- paid work in offices, factories, farms, in other peoples' homes
- remitting money and goods through domestic/other work within and outside their countries
- fetching water for cooking, drinking, washing
- gathering wood/other sources of fuel for cooking and keeping warm
- nurturing and caring for children, extended family members
- providing care and comfort for partner
- defending family against threats, violence, death squads and military
- building peace and maintaining harmony in the home and community
- coping with natural disasters, failure of crops, drought and famine
- volunteering in community/national calamities and disasters
- digging wells, repairing village roads and community buildings
- ensuring environmental protection and sustainability

Add items to this list

² Counting Women's Work: Adapted from International Wages for Housework Campaign (WFH) and WinWages (Women's International Network for Wages for Caring Work).

Module

What can men do to support women

- Deepen their understanding of how gender inequalities work to limit women and girls.
- Stand with women to demand the counting of their contributions and just rewards.
- Help with childcare, food preparation, transport, money. Share in the housework so that their wife/partner can invest in herself.
- Advocate for investment in education and skills-training for women and girls.
- Support other men to stand up with women against violence and other injustices in their lives.
- Work within the church to advocate women's equality and a just partnership between women and men.



Women do 2/3 of the world's work for 5% of the income

Module Handout IIb-2

Gender roles

The biology of women and men does not normally change; people are either male or female. But the social characteristics and roles assigned to women and men differ significantly from society to society and can be changed.

Gender roles are the activities assigned to women and men, based on what they are perceived to be capable of doing. Women's multiple roles in most societies fall into the following three main categories:

Productive – the production of goods for the household, consumption or income through work in or outside the home, for example, in paid jobs, farming, operating small businesses.

Reproductive – domestic or household tasks associated with childbearing, childcare, household tasks, family care, etc.

Church and community management – tasks and responsibilities carried out for the benefit of the community.

Women must balance the demands of these three different roles on a daily basis.

Women are often defined in terms of their reproductive roles – as mothers, housewives, activities associated with having children and caring for families – roles which are perceived as natural. The word “reproductive” moves these activities to a position of lesser value when compared to “productive” activities which are normally associated with the work of men. Because these roles do not earn income, they are not recognized and valued as economically productive in the home, community or society.

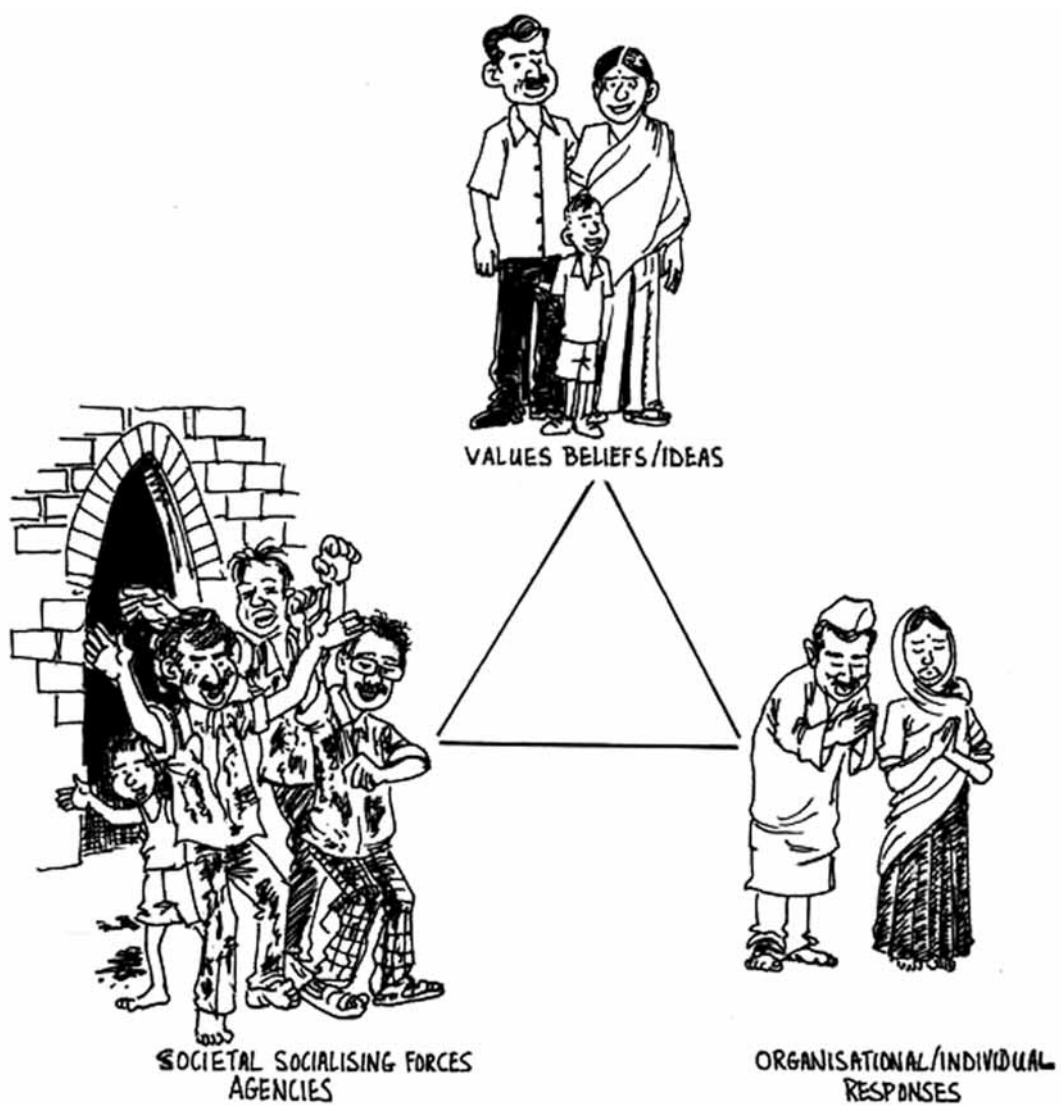
Women also carry out productive activities such as maintaining small agricultural and farming businesses, fishing, and a variety of micro-enterprise trading activities. While these are often the main sources of earning in many homes, they remain undervalued. Many women also hold paid jobs that attract wages in both the formal and informal sectors. But on the whole, women's economically productive roles, in contrast to men's, are too often undervalued or given relatively little recognition.



Module 2

Handout IIb-3

Making connections



Module

Handout III issue 1-1

The basics of economic literacy

The word “economy” originated from two Greek words: *oikos*, meaning house or household and *nomos* which means rule, law or custom. Economy therefore is translated to mean management or stewardship of the household, resources and how goods are produced, distributed and consumed. Generally, this is what women do on an everyday basis, managing the household to ensure that families are fed, clothed and sheltered³. The main themes in economics are as follows:

1. *Scarcity* has to do with the imbalance of needs or wants and available resources. The limited resources cannot supply the current unlimited demand for products (goods) and services. Scarcity requires the making of choices between alternate uses of productive resources. When making choices, it is important to consider all alternative uses of the resources. The choice ultimately is made between the most desirable and the next most desirable alternative.
2. *Productive resources* are factors of production and include everything used to create products and services. The three types are human (labour), natural (land), and capital.
3. *Human resources* are all workers and their abilities, skills, knowledge, experiences, etc. Efficient use requires workers to specialize in what they do best. For example, entrepreneurs, people who take risks associated with starting a new business or producing a new product or service, are an important type of human resource. In career planning, people examine the current trends and demands of the job market.

4. *Natural resources* are all the basic gifts of nature whether above, on, or below the surface of the earth. They are either renewable, such as trees, or non-renewable, like petroleum.
5. *Capital resources* are the resources that have been created by human effort and savings, to be used to produce products or services. Capital resources include tools, machines, and factories. The creation of capital resources requires deferring to the future the consumption of some desired products or services.

Economic systems refer to how the allocation of scarce productive resources is determined. Three basic types of economic systems are traditional, command, and market. Each economic system answers at least three basic questions:

- a. What to produce?
- b. How to produce?
- c. How to distribute the output?

Economic decisions are usually made by governments but in a free market economy there is a minimum of government intervention. International financial institutions act as unelected quasi-governments and write the rules of the global economy. The market economy requires competition among producers, awareness of product availability and alternatives, private ownership, and a limited role for government in the economy.

Managing the economy is the vehicle to enable the achieving of socially-determined goals where all people have what is necessary for a quality of life which affirms human dignity and wholeness.

³ Banaszak, Ronald A, The Nature of Economic Literacy: ERIC Digest No. 41.

Module 3

Handout III issue 1-2

What is economic globalization?

A working definition: Globalization is the integration of international trade, investment and finance and the internationalization of production, resulting in the restructuring of the national and global economy. It has political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. To understand economic globalization, one needs to examine the nature of economic expansion; market competitiveness; dominant economic forms; economic policy shifts; and institutional decision-making shifts and the rules that govern these, especially who makes the decisions and how they are made.

Key features of globalization ⁴

There are several features within globalization. These are not completely new in history but may differ and vary at different points in time. Some of the main features of current globalization are:

- Global production or the internationalization of production: this allows corporations to locate their production sites in different parts of the world where the costs are the lowest.
- Advanced information technology: this includes micro-technology, bio-technology and telecommunications, all of which affect the competitive position of countries and in some countries are inducing a shift from manufacturing towards services and high technology.
- Trade liberalization: corporations and countries try to sell their products where prices are the highest. Governments have had to remove restrictions on direct foreign investment. This puts investors in a strong position in their role in a country's economy.
- Formation of regional trade and economic blocks across many groups of countries.
- Rise and extreme mobility of financial capital as a global player and its resulting strong influence on national policies.
- Increasing power of transnational corporations which make nations compete to offer the lowest wages, tax cuts, etc.
- Restructuring of the state with emphasis on reducing the provision of social welfare, privatization and deregulation, with states ceding more of their power to multilateral and regional frameworks and machinery such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Free Trade in the Americas Agreement (FTAA).

⁴ WIDE – a network of Women in Development – Europe – Economic Literacy Manual.

Module 3

Handout III issue 1-3

Muriel's story

Muriel has a story to tell you about her struggle to maintain her cash crop farm and how she cannot always put a meal on the table for her children. She can tell you about the threats her husband has made to her after the decline in the demand for coffee beans and coconuts. But does she dare tell her story? Today she feels so weak and hopeless. She cannot afford to purchase the necessary tools and pesticides. Her farm is doomed and so is her family. She thought about trying to get credit but she has no collateral and will not qualify. How she wished the Cooperative Society was still functioning in her community. She would have tried to negotiate to have access to a mill to process her coffee beans so that she could package the coffee and sell it to the local village shops. Her coconut farm is also a place of gloom since coconut milk has been poured into her country and into her village from some foreign land. No one can conceive how this canned coconut milk can be marketed at such a low cost. Muriel cannot rise to this competition and the coconut price has gone down to nothing. Who can she turn to for help? She is afraid that her husband's family will think that she is responsible for this bad luck and they will take back their land from her. For most of her life she has always worked hard but owns nothing; she was happy and hopeful when her husband leased this piece of land from his uncle. It was her responsibility to make the land prosper and to provide food for the family.

Muriel's story is similar to that of millions of women's lives in the world today. Her farm is under the threat of being abandoned and unlike many men she has no access to credit, technology and land. Under the free trade and structural adjustment measures in her country, life has become very difficult. Under the new economic reforms many governments in the South are no longer allowed to provide subsidies on agriculture and the open market allows all kinds of products to be put on the supermarket shelves replacing local produce. Like Muriel, many women earn their income from a subsistence economy and are the main food producers for their families. Removal of protection and subsidies on agriculture have a high cost to women's livelihood and as a result weaken families and communities. Only big farmers who run large-scale agriculture businesses can participate in the new market structures. Those who have money, land and other assets are growing richer and the poor are getting poorer. Poverty, like wealth creation, is a process, not a condition – while a few become wealthy, most become impoverished.

How can Muriel and her family survive this hardship?

Module 3

Handout III issue 1-4

My husband's property and my rights

Scene: *Soukeyna, a recently widowed member of the parish, comes to see her pastor on an urgent and distressing matter.*

Pastor: Sit down Soukeyna. How have you been these last couple of months since Thomas passed away?

Soukeyna: Oh, pastor, things have been very hard in trying to provide for our five daughters and in dealing with my husband's family.

Pastor: Yes, yes, the whole parish has been talking about your difficulties. I understand that Thomas' family wishes for the land to be returned to them.

Soukeyna: You see, when we were married Thomas received a piece of the family's land, like the rest of his brothers when each of them was married. Thomas built our house and over the next ten years the two of us worked the land and made the house a good place to raise our five daughters. As the girls grew up, they too helped with the farm to make it provide for the family and to produce goods to sell at the market.

Pastor: All this I know. People say there is not a better farmed patch of land in all the village and your house is a good one... So, why have you come to see me?

Soukeyna: Pastor, it is this trouble with Thomas' family. Now that my husband is dead and it is just me and my girls, they are saying that the land should go back to them. I need your help in dealing with them.

Pastor: You want me to intervene? But what the family wants is according to their traditional rights, Soukeyna, you and Thomas have no sons.

Soukeyna: But pastor, the land is everything to us. We have no other way of providing for ourselves, our house is built on it, and all the family seems to care about is getting the farm regardless of what happens to us. If we lose the farm, we lose everything.

Module 3

Pastor: Surely there must be something you can do.

Soukeyna: Pastor, I married Thomas when I was just a young girl, straight out of my father's house. I didn't have any education. Working the land is all I know. My daughters are too young to marry and without any property, they will not make a good marriage.

Pastor: You do have knowledge of how to work on a farm, even how to run it. There are plenty of other farms where you could work. Perhaps you may even marry again.

Soukeyna: Yes, pastor, but that does not change the fact that Thomas and I made that land what it is today. We both worked night and day, digging, planting, tending, harvesting, raising the animals, everything. When he died, my daughters and I continued the work. The family says this does not matter. As if all that work means nothing. As it is, the family has plenty more land, they do not really need this piece, but if they take it away, the children and I will be left with nothing... It does not make sense. And Thomas would want his daughters to be safe and have enough to eat and live. Why cannot the family see that?

Pastor: But the land does belong to the family, Soukeyna, Thomas was their son.

Soukeyna: And am I not their daughter-in-law and Thomas' wife? And my daughters are their blood.

Pastor: Still, according to tradition, the family has the right to take the farm back.

Soukeyna: Ten years ago we were given a piece of land. Today it is a farm. Then it was empty, now it has crops, animals and a house. Ten years ago I had barely set foot on the ground, now, every inch of the earth is richer for the labour of Thomas, the girls and myself. Can they give that back to me? Do those ten years not give me and my children any rights?

Pastor: Do not be unreasonable, Soukeyna. This is tradition and tradition is what binds a community together.

Soukeyna: But pastor, this tradition is tearing us apart!

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Handout III issue 2-1

Different forms of gender-based domestic violence

Gender-based domestic violence takes several forms, but the main ones are:

Physical violence

- Slapping, hitting
- Punching, kicking, arm twisting
- Shoving, burning, withholding medication
- Threatening to use a weapon, using a weapon
- Shooting, stabbing or cutting



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Sexual abuse

- Rape, forcing a woman to have sex against her wishes – a man does not have the right to force his wife to have sex
- Making a woman do sexual acts that she does not like
- Sexual harassment
- Using objects without a woman's consent



Emotional or psychological violence

- Making threats to harm a woman, her family or pets
- Insulting her in front of others
- Controlling everything she does
- Isolating her from friends and family
- Saying she will never see her children again
- Blaming her for things that are not her fault

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Economic violence

- Maintaining control over money and property
- Not allowing a woman to have her own money
- Keeping her from getting a job or more education
- Making her account for every penny that is spent



Module 3

Handout III issue 2-2

Case studies

Case study 1

I have been married for the past twenty years. When we were married my husband was very good to me, we started having children and then the problems started. He started accusing me of having sex with other men and he started beating me. He also refused to let me see any of my friends as he thought they were the ones leading me to sleep with other men. He also accused them of finding me men to sleep with. Each time any of my friends came to visit me he would really beat me. I could not even come out of the house for four days, at times for longer. I tried to tell my parents but they refused to listen, and said I must be doing something

bad as they said my husband was very good. He stopped me from going to the market unless we went together and when we were together I could not greet other people, especially men. The only place he allowed me to go is church, and for me Sundays have taken on a very special meaning. It is the only time I see other people apart from my family.

My husband is a very dedicated church member and works hard at church; he is a church elder. I have never been able to tell anyone about the incidents of violence at home because I am afraid of what will happen.



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Case Study 2

I was only 14 years when it started happening. I had a cousin who was a really good-standing person in the church where my father ministered. My cousin came home very often and he started teaching me about God's forgiveness for our sins. My parents were very happy that we were learning the Word of God.

We both were members of the church choir. He told me that God would forgive us no matter what we did. Then the day came, he took the Bible and read it aloud. I still remember the passage, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have

eternal life". He said, "Even before I do what I am going to do, I have already been forgiven for my sins and you too have been forgiven so you do not have to worry." He proceeded to rape me, and this continued for the next three years.

I suspected that my parents knew something was going on but they never said anything and I told no one. He went on to a Bible school and now pastors a church himself and I have always wondered if he does not do the same to someone else. I feel that if he does I have contributed because I kept quiet, but I kept quiet because I had no one to talk to and because I didn't know what to do.



Module 3

Case study 3

He had been beating me almost all my life, and the beatings were getting more severe day by day. Every time I heard his voice as he approached our house, I would begin shivering with fear, not knowing what he will beat me with, how long it will last and if he will allow me to stay the night in the house. The pain was the last thing on my mind. I had just given birth so I held the baby in my arms, even though the child was asleep, thinking he will see the baby and leave me alone. He came in, took the child

and threw him on the bed, and he started to hit me. Something inside me snapped. I had had enough of fear, this pain, this humiliation and I could not take it anymore. I reached for the nearest thing to me and, as I picked up a stick, I was thinking, if he recovers from the pain he will most probably kill me. I used all my energy and hit him at the back of his head, he fell down, he was silent, and after a few minutes I realized he was dead.



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Case study 4

Mary was married for five years before she realized that she was being blamed for the marriage having no children. Mary had come to the marriage with one child and then was not able to have any more children. One day her husband announced to her that he was going to marry another woman who could give him children. The second wife came but after two years she too had no children, and still both of

them were blamed. Mary's husband decided to divorce both wives and marry another and this time he said he would make sure she was young. He married someone ten years younger than him and three years later she too was not pregnant. The family blamed her young age for failing to conceive.



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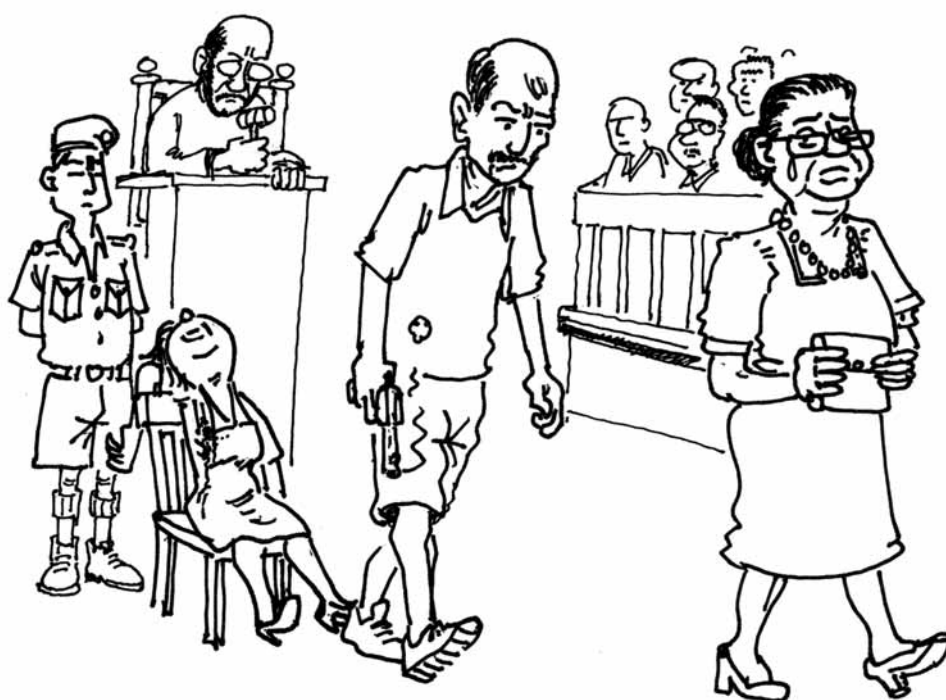
Case study 5

Aisha had been married for ten years before she finally had the courage to leave her violent marriage. She took refuge with an organization that was dealing with women's issues, supporting women to take decisions and become self-sufficient. She did not let her husband or his family know where she was.

The women's organization kept her at a safe house, assisted her with some money to start a small business and then sent her for training. For five months she lived at the safe house and then the organization found her a house in a location they felt was safe and they were able to unite her with her children. She lived alone with the children for the next four years without any harassment from her family or her husband's family.

Finally she felt that as things were going so well and she had gained her independence, she wanted an official divorce. She applied for a

divorce. The day for the court hearing arrived. As Aisha walked in, she noticed that her husband was there with two of his brothers and then she noticed that her mother was also there with her brother. She was overcome with emotion as her mother approached her with tears in her eyes. Aisha too cried and hugged her mother and thanked her for being so understanding. As she turned to go and take her seat in the courtroom full of people, the uncle approached her, and in his hand he had a gun. He pointed it at her, shot her and killed her instantly. The mother got up and walked away followed by her husband and his brother. Aisha lay covered in blood and dead. The uncle was released after a day and the judge was reported as saying that he could not be found guilty, as anyone in the community could understand why he did what he did. Any man worth his soul would do the same in order to restore pride and honour to his family's name.



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Handout III issue 2-3

Power and control⁵

Using intimidation: making a woman afraid by using looks, actions, gestures, smashing things, destroying her property, abusing pets, displaying weapons.



Using emotional abuse: putting her down, making her feel bad about herself, calling her names, making her think she is crazy, playing mind games, humiliating her, making her feel guilty.



⁵ This information is from the Domestic Violence Programme of Duluth, Minnesota, USA.

Module 2

Using isolation: controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads and where she goes, limiting her outside involvement, using jealousy to justify actions.

Minimizing, denying, and blaming: making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously, saying the abuse did not happen, shifting responsibility for abusive behaviour, saying she caused it.

Using children: making her feel guilty about the children, using the children to relay messages, using visitation to harass her, threatening to take the children away.



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Using male privilege: treating her like a servant, making all the big decisions, acting like the “master of the castle”, being the one to define men’s and women’s roles.



Using economic abuse: preventing her from getting or keeping a job, making her ask for money, giving her an allowance, taking her money, not letting her know about or have access to family income.



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Using coercion and threats: making and/or carrying out threats to hurt her, making threats to leave her, to commit suicide, and/or to report her to welfare, making her drop charges, making her do illegal things.



Module 3

Handout III issue 2-4

As a religious leader you can help⁶

- Be supportive to women who have been abused and are seeking help.
- Remind families and the community that no religion accepts violence against women and children.
- Develop a personal understanding of the issue of violence against women.
- Encourage relationships of respect, cooperation and partnership in families, and discourage relationships of power and control over women.
- Believe a woman who tells you about abuse. Too many people do not understand that a problem exists. Tell her it is not her fault, and that no one has the right to hurt her in any way. This will help her gain some self-confidence to take whatever steps she needs to deal with the abuse.
- Deal with the issue of abuse of women in your sermons and teachings. Speak out against violence in marriage. Let it be known in the community that you are a person an abused woman can trust.
- Watch out for signs that a woman may be living with violence and her abuser may be keeping her away from the church.
- Ask direct questions when you suspect that there is abuse going on.
- Do not discuss confidential information with the husband or partner. This could be a real danger for the woman's safety, even if she does not think so.
- Make sure the message that "violence is always unacceptable" is part of any premarital and marital counselling.
- Be informed about the spiritual needs of women who are in, are leaving, or have left abusive relationships.
- Support interfaith dialogue on the issue. Allow space in your church for women's groups and others dealing with the issue of gender-based violence.



Unhelpful responses:

- Blaming the woman for the abuse or suggesting that if she just tried harder, or was more supportive to her husband, the abuse would end.
- Making excuses for her abusive partner, such as he is under stress, or it is due to his alcohol or drug use.
- Trying to take control of the situation and telling her what she must do.
- Minimizing the abuse, and telling her to be grateful that it is not worse.
- Discounting the abuse by saying that it is part of the culture.
- Quoting biblical texts out of context to justify the actions of the abuser.

⁶ YWCA of Canada – There's No Excuse for Abuse, Community Action on Violence Against Women, 1994.

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Handout III issue 2-5

Proposed safety plan for women

- Tell someone nearby about the violence. Ask that person to come or seek help if the person hears that you are in trouble. Perhaps a neighbour, male relative or a group of women or men can come before you are seriously hurt.
- Shout for help or think of a special word or signal that will tell your children or someone else in your family to seek help.
- If you need to run away, think about how to escape. What is the safest way to go?
- Teach your children how to reach a safe place.
- If you can tell that he is going to become violent, try to have it happen where there are no weapons or objects that can be used to harm you, and where you can get away.
- Use your best judgment. Do whatever you need to do to calm him down so that you and your children are safe.
- Save some money privately. Put the money in a safe place or open a bank account in your name so that you can become more independent.
- If you can do so safely, think of other things you can do to become less dependent on him, such as making friends, joining a group, or spending more time with your family.
- See if there are “safe houses” or other services for women who have been abused. Find out about the services of agencies that deal with domestic violence and also your church group or community-based women’s group. Get copies of important documents, such as your passport and ID card. Give them to someone you trust for safekeeping.
- If you can do it safely, practise your escape plan with your children to see if it will work. Make sure that your children will not tell anyone.



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Handout III issue 2-6

Deciding to leave

If a woman decides to leave her husband she may be unprepared for some of the difficulties she will have to face. The most dangerous time for a woman is sometimes the time immediately after she leaves her home. The man has lost control over her and will usually do anything to get it back. He may even try to follow through on his threat to kill her. She must make sure that she is staying in a safe place that he does not know about and where she will be protected. If possible, she should get a protection order from the court.

She should get help from her church and/or the services of a domestic violence agency. She needs someone to accompany her to the police to make a statement of the assault. After deciding to leave home, she should not tell anyone where she is staying. She will need to earn an income for herself and her children. If she has no marketable skills she may need help from outside agencies to learn a trade or skill. This would mean that she would need to seek help in caring for her children if they are little.

When a woman leaves her home she needs to adjust herself to setting up a new life. This is quite a challenge. She may feel scared and lonely because she is not used to being in a strange place. She may miss her partner – no matter what he did to her. When things seem difficult, she should think about how bad it was before she left. This will certainly contribute to increased numbers of reported cases where justice can be served and such action can serve as a deterrent and thus reduce the number of incidences of violence against women.

For change to happen, people must stop thinking of violence against women as something that “is just the way things are” or that it is the woman’s fault. Talking about the abuse is the first step in changing it – for example, finding other women who have the same problems with violent and abusive men and sharing ideas with each other, finding men who also believe that violence is wrong, making violence something that people talk about and think is wrong.

Everyone needs to know that:

- no one has the right to abuse anyone
- there is no excuse for abuse
- women and men have the right to live in safety and security and be free of fear
- women and men who have experienced or are living with abuse are not alone
- there are people who can help deal with violence

Module 3

Handout III issue 3-1

Understanding AIDS (UNAIDS fact sheet)

What is AIDS, and how do you get it?

AIDS (or Auto-Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the result of infection with the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV), and other “opportunistic” infections which invade the body as a result of its diminished capacity for resistance. HIV is passed on through body fluids, the most common avenues for transmission today being sexual intercourse with an infected partner, shared needles used for drug-injecting, and transmission from mother to child during pregnancy or breast-feeding.

In Europe and North America, the earliest cases were identified among male homosexuals, and in these parts of the world HIV was originally thought of as “the gay disease”. In Africa and Asia, the overwhelming majority of infections take place as a result of sexual intercourse between heterosexual men and women. In global terms, the ratio of women to men infected is now 47/53, with the fastest rate of increase occurring in women between the ages of 19 and 25.

What happens when you become infected with HIV?

HIV is not like malaria or meningitis, which have distinctive symptoms and for which treatments are available. HIV gradually destroys the body’s immune system and makes the individual progressively more and more vulnerable to other infections. A person with HIV may be well for many years, then begin to suffer from skin complaints, chest infections, diarrhoea and

The size of the problem

- ☛ 40m people, globally, are HIV+
- ☛ 28.1m live in Sub-Saharan Africa, 6.1m in S and SE Asia, 1.4m in Latin America. In parts of Africa, 36% of adults are HIV+
- ☛ 5m individuals were newly infected in 2001 of whom 42% were women
- ☛ 13.2m children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic

other problems. Eventually, illnesses become more and more frequent, weight loss becomes impossible to ignore, it becomes increasingly difficult to live a normal life, and the person will be described as suffering from AIDS.

Can you cure HIV/AIDS?

There is currently no cure for HIV, although there is medication which can prolong the period of “normal” healthy life. In addition, there is plenty of evidence that good nutrition, a reasonable quality of life, a positive attitude and belonging to a supportive community can delay the onset of symptoms and mitigate their severity. Good basic healthcare is crucial, backed up by the availability of standard treatments for opportunistic infections. Conversely, poverty, malnutrition and hopelessness can hasten the progress of the disease, while frequent attacks of illness are debilitating, and in situations where adequate primary healthcare

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is not available, they may prove fatal. In Europe and North America, where healthcare is generally adequate and drugs are available for treating HIV itself, it has been observed that HIV is no longer a terminal condition. In the developing world, where 95% of all HIV-infected people live, good nutrition and effective primary health services are an impossible dream for the vast majority of the people.

Is there any treatment for HIV/AIDS?

People with HIV are reliant on the availability of treatments for opportunistic infections like pneumonia and tuberculosis. In addition, most HIV-positive people in Europe and North America today have access to specialist combination therapies which enable them to live normal lives by delaying the breakdown of the immune system. The problem is that these therapies remain expensive and so are less relevant in the developing world, where basic painkillers, antibiotics and diarrhoea drugs may be unavailable, and lack of continuity in the supply of medicines to treat tuberculosis is leading to an alarming increase in the incidence of drug-resistant tuberculosis.

What are the elements in the problem?

One of the most striking things about the HIV epidemic is that the current situation has developed out of a phenomenon which was generally recognized as recently as the early eighties. The size of the problem is demonstrated by the numbers living or dying from HIV/AIDS; by the percentage of young adults affected in different places; by the number of unsupported survivors, who include parents and elderly grandparents as well as orphaned children; and by the economic effects of the loss of productive people. The urgency of the problem is demonstrated by the rapid increase in the number of infections in all but a very few countries in the developing world.

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Handout III issue 3-2

The story of Mama Thembi⁷

Mama Thembi, an unmarried domestic worker with five children, works long hours and earns very little. Life is a daily struggle for survival but for Mama Thembi life is not a futile battle because she is driven by a vision. She wants her children to be educated, find good jobs, have their own families and provide for her. Her resilience comes from her faith in God and her local church.

Her hard work bore fruit. Her eldest daughter Phiwe qualified as a nurse and married a teacher. Phiwe was pregnant with twins. Two months before the twins were due, Mama Thembi received a call from the hospital informing her that Phiwe had been admitted into the emergency ward. While waiting for the doctor, Mama Thembi saw many posters on HIV/AIDS. She had heard about HIV/AIDS from the community radio station but she knew from her church and community that it was a shameful disease and a punishment from God for those who were sexually immoral.

The doctor came and broke the tragic news. Both the twins and Phiwe were HIV positive. All Mama Thembi heard was “HIV/AIDS!!” These words struck terror in her heart, she was afraid, confused and filled with shame. Phiwe felt the same, all she could do was ask her mother what she had done to deserve this punishment from God. They both felt condemned and forsaken by God. Mama Thembi’s pastor

tried to comfort her but she could see that it was difficult for him, because he thought that HIV/AIDS was a punishment from God.

This is a true story that reflects the experiences and courage of many women in Africa. It is a tribute to the daily acts of compassion of countless women who, despite their poverty, find creative ways of meeting the needs of those in their community who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. It also highlights the challenge to churches to meet the spiritual needs of those affected by HIV/AIDS.

⁷ Adapted from a story by Nontando Habebe in *Crossing Ten Seas*, WARC publication, Geneva, 2003.

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Handout IV-1

Malika's story

I was born as the eldest of a family of five children. My fondest memories of my early childhood were the many evenings playing in the front yard with my brothers and sisters and neighbourhood children, and the scary stories told to us by my grandfather as we huddled beside him around a fire which kept mosquitoes away. I also loved the sound of rain on the roof and the smell of wet grass after the rain. I loved to be rocked by my father as he sang "What a friend we have in Jesus" and "Do no sinful action" which was the main method of putting me to sleep. Then to be carried by father or mother to bed. Sometimes I even pretended to be asleep just to be carried to bed. My mother seemed always busy and she often looked tense and worried. She was always the last to take her meal and always took the bones and gravy, saving the best parts of the meat

for my brothers and my father. I have never known my mother doing something just for the fun of it except I remember how her face lit up when she was arranging fresh flowers for our home and when my baby brother began to say ma'am. I sometimes had nightmares about my mother's unhappiness.

Just as I was beginning to know my world and explore a little I realized that I was a girl and different from my brother. I was restricted to where I could go alone and what games I could play. When I started menstruating, it was the worst time. I did not have the biological details and it seemed like a curse to women. During menstruation I was not allowed to climb trees, take communion and go to religious functions. My grandmother was always checking to see



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that I was well clad with proper underclothes. I was no longer allowed to play in the front yard and to socialize with boys. I was always under the watchful eyes of my parents, grandparents and neighbours. I was conscious about the disparities in relation to my younger brother who was free to do whatever he wanted to do. He went out freely and had no restrictions in relation to menstruation and no one seemed to care that he played with boys as well as girls. At fourteen, my younger brother was put in charge of us when my parents were not at home.

My parents and grandparents talked about my brother's future and about his success in life. They invested more in his education because he was being raised to be a breadwinner and they began to look around for a marriage partner for me. I resented this: I longed for the freedom of my brother and wished I had the choices he had. I wanted to be an architect but when I told my family this they said that "I was playing man" and what I needed to do was to learn how to please my future husband by being a good cook and housekeeper. At the age of nineteen I fell in love with Leslie who was twenty-two and working at a commercial bank. I spent a lot of time daydreaming about our romance and praying for a lifelong partnership with Leslie and for three children.

Three years after our marriage we had two children and my life seemed to be a blur, except for taking care of our children and managing our

home. Leslie spent most of his waking hours at work and began to be distant. I later learnt that he was having an affair with one of his colleagues. I cried my eyes out and felt emptiness in my stomach. I was so lonely and felt badly about myself. When we were in the company of others he would humiliate me and I became quiet and felt that I was dumb. Many nights I cried in the dark pitying myself and my powerlessness. Leslie seemed oblivious to my pain and he lived a life which excluded me except for my taking care of all his domestic needs. I became aware that I was of no value and that all I did in managing our home and raising the children almost single-handedly was taken for granted.

Leslie also managed our assets and made all financial decisions without my involvement. I asked him about the investments and plans for our money. He said the portfolio belonged to him and that I would not understand it. He also said that I was out of league (beyond my boundary) because he had earned the money and provided for the family, while all I did was stay at home and that I should consider myself lucky that I was not working. Even my parents told me that I was lucky. Then why did I feel so empty inside and why did I feel worthless and lonely? Why was my husband not attracted to me anymore? Why did he have affairs with other women? I could not remember the last time he looked at me with admiration or desire. I cannot remember any tender moments spent with him during the last few years.

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Then I began to wonder, who am I and what am I? I have no life except to serve my husband and children. I often wonder what life would have been if I had gone to university like my brother; if I really had become an architect and married someone who never took me for granted and never stopped loving me. I wanted to get a job too, to be in control of my earnings and to also take hold of my life. I wanted to have friends and to go out with them, to laugh and to share my dreams. I wanted to feel loved and to be creative. If anyone knew my thoughts they would say that I was loose and a bad woman.

When I was forty years old my husband ran off with another woman. He applied for a divorce and I did not know what to do. I cried for months and felt that I was in a dark hole and could not get out. I pleaded with him but he just insulted me. He then demanded that I move out of his house but leave the children. I realized that I had nothing because our bank account and property were all in his name. I felt that my life was over. I did not know what to do with myself. Will I survive?



Module 5

Handout V-1

Definitions of leadership

Leaders are those who lead by serving others. They must be able to delineate what is good for people and create a climate of respectability, confidence, transparency and dignity. Often the head of an organization or institution is referred to as the leader. Dr Laurence J Peter, developer of the Peter Principle, maintains that: “Many are called leaders by virtue of their being ahead of the pack or at the top of the pyramid, and that is one definition of the word leader. But being out front or on top denotes only position and not the qualities of leadership. There is a significant difference between being in charge and being a leader.”⁸

Leaders are not born as leaders but grow and develop or are made leaders. An effective leader

does not have mystical power bestowed at birth. Over the years, there have been many examples of leaders who appear to have achieved exceptional results through hard work, dedication and charisma. Everyone has leadership traits which can be developed, nurtured and applied to produce measurable results. Leadership can be said to be both a skill and an art which inspires or motivates people to work towards a goal.

Leadership is situational: different situations call for different styles of leadership. A major general of an army will need a different style of leadership from a church leader or a leader of a social support group or trade union movement. The nature and goals of an organization will necessitate a particular style of leadership which will enable the organization to grow and develop utilizing the gifts and strengths of each person.



Leadership styles

1. Authoritative: the leader makes the decisions and the group complies.
2. Political: the leader makes the decisions and promotes and sells them to the group.
3. Evaluative: the leader presents her/his ideas to the group and invites questions and comments.
4. Participative: the leader works with her/his colleagues/associates in a collective process to determine alternatives which are then presented to the group to choose from.
5. *Laissez-faire*: the leader takes a “back seat” and the group makes decisions and the leader complies.

⁸ As quoted in Guyana Chronicle, Sunday, June 4, 2000 by Lal Balkaran in “The art of effective leadership”.

Module 5

Handout V-2

Power and leadership
to control or transform?⁹

Power in its different forms is woven into all aspects of life. It is seen in the roots of political oppression, economic exploitation, militarism, violence against women and children, racial and religious conflict and sexism. Power is also a significant part of the structures created to enable society and the family to function

according to a specific model. All human relationships carry a variety of expressions of power, both positive and negative. To understand the uses and abuses of power, it is also necessary to identify the role played by authority and influence in relation to power.

POWER-OVER



⁹ This is a composite from articles on power by Ranjini Wickramaratne-Rebera.

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Authority

Authority is different from power. A person with authority need not always exercise power. Authority gives a person the right to be heard and taken seriously and is based on certain external circumstances, such as skills, knowledge, position or relationships. A parent has authority in a family because society teaches children that parents are the final authorities within a family unit. A doctor speaks with authority on medical matters and the patient recognizes the doctor's authority on the subject. A pastor speaks with authority because ministerial training and theological studies have given her/him the right to do so and the congregation grants her/him this right. However the most significant understanding of authority lies in the authorship of our stories: each of us speaks with true authority when we speak for ourselves.

Influence

Persons who are uncomfortable with the word "power" often prefer the concept of influence. It has gentler images of control when compared to the image of power as dominance. Examples of influence can be seen, for example, in committees which are composed of a majority of men. A woman may speak but not be heard, until a man repeats the same idea as if it originated with him, while the woman remains silent rather than claiming her right to own her suggestion. A woman who had suggested a way out of a difficult decision-making process and had the words taken away from her by a male committee member, was asked why she had kept silent. Her response was that she was happy to influence the resolution of the matter and that she was not important to the process. In such situations, influence is used by women and men in a negative manner. Women abdicate their

right to celebrate their identity by owning their contribution. Men abdicate their right to mutuality by permitting women to exercise subtle control over them and by not affirming women's contributions as being valid and equal. In both these examples, power is exercised in a subtle manner in the form of influence, although often such power can also be understood as manipulative power.

Power

The most predominant and visible expression of power within the human community is dominant power. Power as dominance, as arrogance, as separation must not be permitted to polarize and subordinate the vulnerable. Women have to permit themselves the right to own and claim power for themselves and to use it for wholeness, for empowerment and for building community. Perhaps women's socialization makes them react negatively to this proposition. Yet there is evidence of change when the collective power of women is harnessed to challenge abusive or controlling systems.

It is through such uses of power that the nature of power can be defined. Power has to be applied or placed within a relationship with someone or something to be identified as good, bad, necessary or excessive. Power does not become visible in a vacuum.

Linked to the image of dominant power are masculine images of control and dominance. While this aspect of power is usually associated with men, many women also use control and dominance as easily as men. Dominant power is not solely gender-based. It is a human use of power that is evident from childhood right through to adulthood. In recent years the use of the terms "feminine power" or the "feminiza-

Module 5

tion of power” are becoming known. These terms are used to differentiate between dominant masculine power and feminine power which is often defined within the context of relationships. However, many men have also become comfortable with the feminine expression of power. Power has no gender. It is the recognition of the way in which it is used that enables us to name it as masculine or feminine power. To assume that all men use masculine power and that all women use feminine power is to overlook the consequences of power by focusing on the sex of the person using power.

There are many ways in which the use of power is identified. Among them are two important aspects that have been used in church history and theology and that sometimes add to the many divisions in Christian communities and churches. They are power in difference and identity, and power that is gender-based.

Difference and identity as power

The human community consists of a vast range of differences. From race and ethnic identity, through gender and cultural differences, to ideological and theological differences, each person is different. At the heart of the creation of humanity lies the concept of difference. This motif of difference runs through the creation story, seen in the contrasts between night and day, water, earth and air, fauna and flora, and male and female. Into such difference control and power have been injected. For Christians, the dualism visible in the creation story has reinforced theories of power, dominance and control. There seems to be an implicit understanding that difference must result in hierarchy. Hierarchy is not confined to male-female relations alone. Women, too, claim their right to control, based on their racial or ethnic origins,

or their husband’s position of authority in church or society, or their own positions of authority. Difference in status, education, economic resources, even denominational heritage become rungs in the ladder of hierarchy. Within the community of faith these elements continue to contribute to the assumption of power as dominance and continue to place God as head, followed by male, then female and so through the different categories of creation. Such interpretations continue to be used when gender issues cause destabilization or conflict within the Christian community. Difference, identity and equality were never intended to be opposing forces. By placing them in opposing positions a separation has been created between every element of creation. The greatest evidence of separation can be seen when the issues of gender are addressed. Within the Christian church that has as its centrepiece a gospel of love and peace with justice, the pain of difference and separation in order to dominate and control are often superimposed.

Difference and identity cannot be ignored. It is therefore essential to learn to view them not as a basis for division and conflict, but as a basis for right relations. Such an approach will move difference and equality from opposing ends into relational positions within human society. It will challenge dominant power that exercises control. When difference as a relational force is affirmed, the depth and meaning of human relationships can be recognized. Mutuality will become the foundation for interconnectedness. The possibility for true inclusivity would become an experienced reality. “Power-over” people can be replaced by “power-with” people. Power and difference then become partners in creating healing and wholeness.

Module 5

Power and authoritarian styles of leadership

This style of leadership is often associated with masculine leadership. It is one where power is often used to dominate and control. It is a style that is used by women as well as men when they are given leadership roles. Women leaders who act in an authoritarian manner may often deny they use power in this way. However, they may be acting in this manner because:

- Women as leaders have to prove themselves as being capable of leadership. Men are assumed to be good leaders because they are men. Women leaders often feel a strong sense of inadequacy unless they are accepted as competent leaders by both women and men.
- By using power as authority, women leaders can safeguard their positions by disempowering any women who could replace them. Using their authority is one way to counteract

WOMEN AND WOMEN

POWER-OVER



Module 5

the impact made by other women who may also work to undermine their role as leader.

- When women work against a woman leader, they are often motivated by the need to deny any other woman the right to use power. Women leaders can become a threat to a male leader who could be the pastor, a husband, a son or a good friend. For those women who gain their identity through the position and power held by a male family member, strong women pose a grave threat. Assertive women can also be seen as symbols challenging the stereotyping of women as powerless.
- As caregivers, women often internalize the exercise of power through creating dependency. This style of power can be observed in a family that has been made dependent on a mother, or a sister or a grandmother. It is also visible where a female personal assistant creates an environment where a male boss becomes dependent on her in carrying out his job as the boss.
- When authoritarian leaders – women and men – are not held accountable to the community, they often continue to exercise personal power as well as controlling power. In such situations the community has a choice of permitting control to continue or of developing strategies for placing boundaries around the leader. Boundaries include establishing a process for evaluating the work of the community and the function of the leader.

In considering the role of women as leaders in a church community it is important that we examine the images of power that are endorsed by our theology. Unfortunately much of the theology that deals with submission, humility and self-sacrifice seems to be applied to the roles

and function of women in the church community. Often women themselves are responsible for perpetuating these images by claiming to be self-effacing. The use of biblical images to reinforce some of these concepts is also a reality for many women. Unfortunately many women continue to equate submission to self-sacrifice and deny themselves the right to claim dignity and value as a human right. The understanding of “unconditional love” to mean self-sacrifice or to being “door mats” or to keeping silent in the face of oppressive and abusive power is an inaccurate interpretation of this phrase. Such misinterpretation needs to be challenged and corrected by women and men.

Reeducating women and men to challenge and address the inherited notion of their powerlessness is a good starting point for learning to value women equally with men as persons made in God’s image. Many women find it hard to accept power as a human force. The socialization of girls and boys begins with the assumption of male power and female powerlessness. In order to be able to claim the right to own power, many women have learned to create networks of dependency which enable them to exercise power through influence and control. The book of Esther in the Bible portrays well how women use influence as power to achieve their goals.

Learning to peel away the many layers of images within women which have moulded their expectations of themselves when working with others is essential to the task of remodelling copartnership. A partnership of equals between women and men, or between women and women, must be based on women’s acceptance of themselves as persons of value.

Module 5

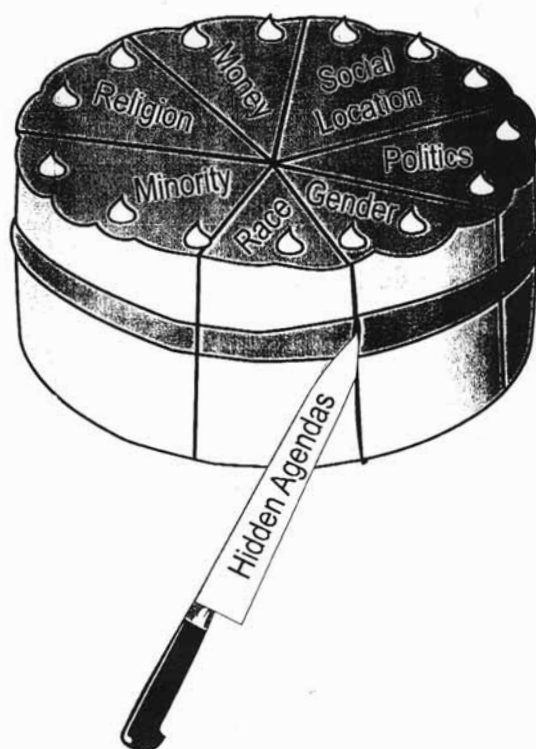
Power of the weak

Powerlessness as a collective force can be harnessed for positive action. History has shown that oppressed peoples working collectively can overthrow the controlling and abusive power of dictators and governments. At such times the term “power of the weak” is recognizable as a positive use of power. The harnessing of power when trapped within patriarchal systems is another facet of the power of the weak. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of powerlessness, to be able to use collective powerlessness as a platform for change, could prove to be a life-giving experience.

Transformation as power

Transforming power is the vision that can keep women and men on the journey to creating a partnership of equals within the community of faith. It is embedded in experiencing “power-with” as the basis for our being connected to each other. This is not power sharing, as power sharing may contain elements of arrogance and dominance. Who is it that decides how the cake of power is to be cut and how it is to be shared? Or when it is to be cut or not cut? Inequalities can be incorporated into power sharing. However, when women and men are able to experience power with each other, the transformation of one leads to the trans-

Power Sharing



Module 5

formation of all. Similarly, the oppression of one leads to the oppression of all. In experiencing power with each other women and men are interconnected. They are drawn to work together while respecting each one's identity and affirming their mutual need for each other. At such moments women and men can become aware of "power-within" each individual and the community as a whole.

Power-within has the potential for transforming both the individual and the community. It can create a healing community where victims of abusive power have a voice and are believed and loved into healing and wholeness.

Power-within can establish justice for all within a community. This includes accountability from those who would use power to control and dominate. It becomes the catalyst for creating processes that will challenge and change forms of power that legitimize unjust structures and systems, including controlling leadership within the community.

Power-within has the potential to transform the understanding and experiencing of God as women and men work in mutuality and inclusivity. It connects them to God as the source of life-giving power that created us different and equal.

Power-within continues to challenge women and men to create a community where peace with justice, freedom with equality, and love with vulnerability become the basis for living.

Module 5

Handout V-3

Some basic principles of leadership for transformation

The transformational leader is a change agent who seeks to transform the institution through realigning its structure, culture and norms with the new vision. Such a leader is committed to a shared vision and purpose and understands that working with others is essential to achieving established goals. Some elements of transformational leadership are:

- **Shared leadership** promotes leadership as a shared responsibility and understands that the role of the leader is one of facilitating the leadership ability and potential of all group members, women and men.



- **Cooperation vs competition** understands that the more people in a group cooperate with each other, the more commitment they are likely to feel to the group and its objectives.
- **People's involvement in setting their own course** develops power sharing techniques and encourages commitment and responsibility for the group's wellbeing and for members' own participation.
- **People's opinions and active participation** are encouraged until group members become used to participating. This allows for few arbitrary decisions.
- **Cooperative processes** such as consensus decision-making are incorporated and the group is encouraged to think along these lines.
- **Striking a balance** between friendly cooperation (members trust each other and work well together) and freedom to be critical, speak out and disagree (promotes interest, develops new ideas and challenges group members to "think outside the box").

Module 7

Handout VII-3

Setting goals and objectives

Defining the goal

A project should clearly state its goals or aims, so that it can be clearly understood. Goals are broad, general statements about what you want to do in response to the problems you have identified.

How do you develop and define a goal or aim for a project?

The goal of a project should be to solve the problem or problems described. For example, if one of the options you have identified is to enable the church to work effectively with community groups on HIV/AIDS, this particular goal could read: *“To develop a gender-sensitive strategy for the church to work effectively with community groups on the issue of HIV/AIDS.”*

A goal is the broad and long-range accomplishment that you wish to achieve. To determine your goal you must answer the question “Who are you trying to reach and what are you trying to accomplish?”

Developing objectives

Objectives are what the project expects to do in order to attain its goal. An objective is like a compass – it points the way to achieving the goal. Objectives provide specific directions or actions that will make your goal statements a reality.

Objectives are expressed in terms of expected outcomes or results – what will be the result and how long will this take – and clearly state the connection to the project goal.

Objectives should be **clear, specific, measurable and observable** so that you know when you have achieved them. Well-defined objectives should describe clearly and concisely what you want to accomplish: what will be done, how it will be measured, and when it will be completed.

Remember that good objectives are:

- S** Specific actions to help accomplish the project goal
- M** Measurable or observable
- A** Answers to the questions of who, what, when, where, and how
- R** Realistic in recognizing the concrete things a project can actually accomplish
- T** Time-limited

Module 8

Handout VIII-1

Sample evaluation form

A. Content

1. How relevant did you find the modules and activities?

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2. What was most useful?

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3. What was least useful?

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4. What would you add?

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.....

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Module 8

B. Methodology

5. How effective was the methodology used in this workshop?

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6. What worked well?

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.....

7. What did not work well?

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8. How can this be improved?

.....

.....

.....

Module

8

C. Participation (participants)

9. Was participation satisfactory?

.....

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.....

10. Why/why not?

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.....

11. How can this be improved?

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.....

Module 8

D. Comment on facilitators and resource persons in relation to the following:

12. Knowledge and presentation of topics and issues covered

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13. Facilitation skills/style

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.....

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E. Time management

14. Was time management effective?

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.....

.....

Module 8

F. Facilities

15. How could this be improved?

16. How were the workshop facilities?

17. How could these be improved?

G. Any other comments

Module 8

Handout VIII-2

Suggested Liturgy for Eucharist Celebration¹⁰

What is needed

- Elements for Eucharist – you are encouraged to use your indigenous or local food for the bread and wine.
- Candles – one for each person and one big one to be lit at the beginning of the service.
- Symbols of life, hope and partnership.
- Pieces of paper and pencils for participants to write their commitments.

Preparation

- Arrange seating in a circle, semi-circle or horse shoe.
- Arrange candles on a small low table in the middle. You may also arrange flowers and leaves on or around the table.
- Leave a box of matches nearby.
- Ask participants ahead of time to bring with them anything that symbolizes life, hope and partnership.

Call to worship

Sisters and brothers: arise and lift up your hearts. Arise and lift up your eyes; arise and lift up your voices.

The living God, the living and moving Spirit of God has called us together in witness, in struggle and in celebration.

Open your hearts and minds as you reach out toward each other, as God reaches out toward us!

Let us worship God!

Hymn

(of your choice)

Scripture

Luke 4.18-19

Litany

The Spirit Cries: “Listen!” (based on Luke 4.18-19)

The Spirit of God was upon him to bring good news to the poor.

The Spirit cries: “Listen!” The world’s resources are unequally distributed between men and women. The majority of the world’s poor are women, by law and tradition deprived of land, decent jobs, fair wages, equal access to education.

The Spirit of God was upon him to proclaim release to the captives.

The Spirit cries: “Listen!” Many women are imprisoned in their homes by domestic violence. Women are afraid to leave the safety of their homes at night and yet many are also afraid because of the unsafety in their homes, or afraid for themselves and their children, or because of unsafety in times of war and conflicts.

The Spirit of God was upon him to heal the blind and the sick.

The Spirit cries: “Listen!” Women and men are deprived of basic necessities including food,

¹⁰ The liturgy is adapted from *Envisioning God’s Justice for Women in Worship* by Jennifer Butler, www.ew2000+.

Module

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security, health care and education. AIDS has brought one of the major threats to life today and women bear the brunt of caring for the sick and comforting the dying and bereaved.

The Spirit of God was upon him to let the oppressed go free.

The Spirit cries: "Listen!" Women's voices are often missing from the public arena, from pulpits, from church leadership, history books and literature. Their images are degraded in the media, on bill boards and magazine covers; their character, in films and television shows.

The Spirit was upon him, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. May the Spirit of the Lord be among us, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Men: We have seen the oppression of our sisters and brothers in the face of war and conflict. We will work for peace with justice in the name of the One who proclaimed the year of God's favour.

Women: We strive to free ourselves and our sisters and brothers from the bond of oppression, in the name of the One who proclaimed the year of God's favour.

Together: We mourn those who have not been treated as children of God. We strive for the redemption of all creation. We hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ in our relationships with one another. May God's kingdom come, God's will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Silent meditation for 3 minutes as we reflect on our own failure and the failure of the church to address gender injustices.

Prayer

In your image we have been created, male and female. God of Life, hear our confession:

We have not always seen ourselves and each other as created in your image.

We have treated one another as less than who you created us to be.

We have treated ourselves as less than what you created us to be.

We have stood silently by as your children have been mistreated.

Transform us with the power and hope of your resurrection.

Fill us with courage to restore our relationships to ourselves and each other so that they reflect your love and justice.

For we know that it is through this work that we will come face to face with you.

Amen.

Module 8

Affirmation of Faith

Leader: We are not alone; we live in God's world.

People: We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus to reconcile and make new.

Leader: We trust God who calls us to be the church; to love and save the whole humanity; to serve justice and resist evil; to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

People: In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with and in us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

The Lord's Prayer

(together, each person in her/his own language)

A time for commitments

Leader: We present before God our commitments to work for partnership of women and men and to be the change we want to see.

Hymn

A prayerful hymn of your choice and if possible drums also.

During the singing of the hymn participants are asked to write one commitment each on the paper provided and to present this before God. They are invited to take the paper with their commitment and their symbols of life, hope and partnership to the centre table. The commitment should be placed in the basket or bowl provided and the symbols around the basket or bowl. After this each person lights a candle from the big one to take back with her/him to her/his seats.

Invitation for all to partake in the feast

Hymn

(during which the bread and wine is passed around for all to eat and drink)

Sharing of the peace

(people should move around and greet each other and share the peace of God as is appropriate for the culture)

Blessing

May God bless you and be near you in everything you do.

May God strengthen you and give you courage to reach out for your sisters and brothers in need.

May God empower you to speak the right words and do the right deeds for more justice, more love and more peace.

Part II

Bible study resources

Creating the Bible studies: A brief overview of the methodology used

Basic principle

The Bible is a written record that was inspired by God and written by people. It contains universal truths that reveal God, Jesus and the work of the Spirit. It is important to encounter the message of the Bible within the context of the time in which it was written, as well as within the world today. To do otherwise would be to freeze God's message in the Scriptures to a particular place and time in history.

Steps in creating these studies

Exegesis: Taking the text as the primary focus at this stage and exploring it with a number of questions such as:

- Why was a particular book or passage written?
- What does it say about God?
- What is God saying to the people to whom the book or passage is addressed?
- What does the book or passage reveal about the historical period in which it was written?
- Why was the book or passage placed where it is in the Bible?

Interpretation: Understanding the meaning of the text, using questions such as:

- What does the writer mean in a particular passage or verse?
- What is the passage or verse saying about the spiritual and religious needs of the people of that time?
- What words, phrases or concepts make it difficult to understand the meaning of the text?
- Are such difficulties caused by the translation of the passage or verse from its original language?
- What does the passage or verse tell us about God, Jesus and the work of the Spirit?
- What resources can help in understanding the meaning? eg commentaries, articles or books by scholars or other writers, discussion with theologically trained persons including pastors, joining a Bible study course or group?

Relevance: Relating the meaning of the text to ourselves, to church life, to society or to particular issues, using questions such as:

- Is there only **one** way to interpret the passage or verse?
- What factors affect the interpretation and relevance of the passage or verse?
- How do the following factors influence interpretation and meaning?
 - The age of the reader or hearer;
 - The gender of the reader or hearer;
 - The culture of the reader or hearer;
 - The socio-economic world in which the reader or hearer is located;
 - The church traditions of the reader or hearer;
- How relevant is the passage or verse to a particular issue, eg: violence, gender, power, etc.?

Communication: Sharing the meaning and relevance of the text with others, by using methods and vocabulary that are understood and culturally compatible with persons or groups receiving the message. The studies in the manual use the following methods to communicate the text being studied:

- A brief reflection on the passage using exegesis and interpretation.
- Questions to enable participants to explore interpretation and relevance for themselves.
- Creative processes such as role play, storytelling and biblio-drama to contextualize the meaning. Other creative methods such as art, music, puppets, drama etc. are also effective means for communicating message and meaning.

Ranjini Wickramaratne-Rebera

Module

Handout I-2

Earning the right to lead:
Miriam

Texts

Exodus 15.20-21**Numbers 12, 20.1****Micah 6.4**

Background to Exodus

The book of Exodus is the second book in the Hebrew Scriptures and is a record of the Israelite period of slavery in Egypt, their escape and their wanderings in the wilderness for forty years. Scholars believe that Exodus, Genesis, Leviticus and Numbers were probably put together around the 6th century BCE. It is possible that these books were based on several other sources and traditions that were in existence during this time. Exodus, which has also been referred to as the second book of Moses, records Yahweh's encounter with Moses on Mount Sinai, the receiving of the Ten Commandments and the building of the tabernacle. The main themes of the book of Exodus are:

- a) the liberation of the community from oppression to freedom;
- b) the establishing of God's Law in the community (the ten commandments); and
- c) the establishing of a covenant between God and the community. Moses, Aaron and Miriam were the three leaders of the Israelite community during this period.

The role of women
in the wilderness community

The text, written from a male perspective, does not detail the roles played by women in preparing for the flight from Egypt. However, Exodus 3.22 does say that it was the women who were instructed to collect jewellery of silver and gold, plus clothing from Egyptian women and to place them on their own children as they left. It is possible therefore to assume that women were active participants although they are recorded as acting under the instructions of male leaders to plunder the Egyptians.

What would have been the tasks of women in any community that is forced into exile? It is safe to say that women would have been actively involved in the organization of the day to day life of the community in exile, especially if it no longer had well-defined laws and basic facilities for living. However, women were not named as coleaders in this community. Their secondary role with no status or authority is evident in the silence of the text regarding the role of women. Therefore the mention of Miriam by name has a greater significance than that of her family relationship with Moses.

Module

Who was Miriam?

- Her story is recorded in Exodus and Numbers.
- It is part of the story of the Israelites' years in slavery in Egypt and the period they were wandering in the wilderness.
- During the Israelites' escape through the sea and their years in the wilderness, Miriam is named as one of the Israelites' leaders, together with Moses and Aaron, her brothers.
- Miriam is mentioned by name in seven texts. Since women were rarely mentioned by name in the Bible, it is obvious that she was a person of importance in her community.

What more do we know about Miriam?

- a) She is believed to be the unnamed sister in the birth story of Moses. (Ex 2.4-7)
- b) She is named in the list of ancestors in Numbers and is referred to as the sister of Moses and Aaron.
- c) Her actions in this episode show her to be a woman with:
 - confidence: perhaps she worked with her mother to save the baby.
 - the ability to take risks: she must have hidden and watched over her brother, to have noticed Pharaoh's daughter's arrival at the river. Would she have pushed the basket towards where the women were bathing?
 - initiative: would she have done something to make the baby cry so he would be noticed?
 - the ability to make quick decisions.
 - a great deal of resourcefulness: had she planned to volunteer her mother for the role of nurse and caregiver?

- d) Miriam showed leadership skills even at a young age.

What role did women have in Miriam's community?

The Bible does not tell us what part women played during this time. But, if we use our own experiences and if we examine how women react when there is a breakdown in society, we can imagine what the women in this community would have done to make life easy for everyone. When there are no schools, no hospitals, no medical facilities, no laws, no places for worship, no water, no houses, how would women and men have reacted?

- a) Women were included as participants when the Israelites were making preparations to flee from Egypt. (Ex 3.22)
- b) They followed the instructions of the male leaders and plundered clothes from Egyptian women. They also collected valuable jewellery to take with them into exile.
- c) They led the celebrations, which would have included men, women and children, when they safely crossed the sea. (Ex 15.1-21)
- d) They would perhaps have been the main carers of the community while they lived in the wilderness.
- e) Women could have worked independently of male leaders, if necessary, to keep the community cared for and secure.
- f) Women with special leadership skills could perhaps have used these skills in making decisions among the women and accomplishing the work to be done. Perhaps Miriam was one of these women.

Module 1

- g) The fact that Miriam was mentioned by name in such a community is significant. It points to her role as a leader with authority and respect in the total community, not only among the women.

What qualities of leadership did Miriam display?

- *She was a community and religious leader (Ex 15.1-21)*

Exodus 15.1-21 records the “Song at the Sea”. It is the oldest written fragment concerning the exile that exists. The fragment carries the title: “The Song of Miriam”. Scholars now accept that it was Miriam’s song although it appears in the text as “The Song of Moses”. It seems to have been preserved as Moses’ song because the male ownership of the song gave it a greater degree of credibility. The traditions of the Hebrew people place the celebration of victory after war as belonging exclusively to women. Therefore when the women, led by Miriam, danced and sang in celebration of Yahweh who had delivered them, they were continuing the ancient role of women as leaders in celebration. Miriam is named as the central figure in the celebration of the victory over the Egyptians. Her song is preserved as an important part of this ritual of celebration. Miriam’s appearance as the leader occurs with no previous introduction and therefore she must have been known in the community through other accounts about her.

- *She was a prophet*

Exodus 15.20 names Miriam as the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister. Miriam is one of four women prophets mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. The others were: Deborah (Judges 4), Huldah (2 Kings 22.14-15), and the unnamed woman in Isaiah 8.3. There is every reason to believe that women prophets carried out the same functions as male prophets. They were regarded as people who spoke on behalf of Yahweh and who were authorities in sacred matters concerning the whole community. The ability to make oracular pronouncements was an important aspect of being recognized as a prophet. Miriam’s title as prophet emerges out of the challenge she and Aaron placed before Moses in a struggle for leadership in the community. (Num 12.6-8).

Her challenge to Moses concerning his marriage to a Cushite woman is a public confrontation on behalf of the total community. Miriam’s position that Yahweh had spoken through her and Aaron and not only through Moses, makes this a legitimate claim for being called a prophet. She thus becomes the first person, not only the first woman, to be given this title in the Hebrew Scriptures.

- *She was outspoken*

In Numbers 12.1-3 we read of Miriam and Aaron’s criticism of Moses’ marriage to a woman from Cush – a foreigner. Why did this criticism happen?

- a) Miriam’s criticisms may have been made because the woman was a foreigner and that

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would mean foreign blood entering their family. Keeping a race “pure” is often used to give a sense of security to people living in exile or under foreign rule.

- b) It could have been because of her loyalty to the women in her community who were overlooked by her brother when he chose a wife.
- c) She felt she had the right to speak out because God had spoken to all of them, not only to Moses.
- d) Maybe Miriam may have seen herself as the voice of the community and felt that she needed to let Moses hear that the community was unhappy with his choice.
- e) Perhaps there was some tension or conflict between the two sisters-in-law.

We can only fill in the silence as to why Miriam and Aaron challenged Moses. However, only Miriam was punished by God for her outspokenness.

- a) Was Aaron left out of the punishment because he was a priest?
- b) Why was leprosy seen as a punishment? Anyone with leprosy or an infectious disease was required by religious law to be placed outside the walls of the city. Such a person would be seen as being rejected by the whole community because of their illness. Miriam, by falling ill with leprosy, was seen as receiving a punishment from God.

- c) However, the whole community refuses to move on without her. (Num 12.15). Moses also pleaded with God to heal her.
- d) Miriam was healed in seven days. It was only then that the whole community moved camp.
- e) With her physical healing, there was also a healing of the differences between the three leaders: Moses, Miriam and Aaron.
- f) Her place of burial is recorded in Numbers 20.1.
- g) Her courage and her leadership role in the community give her the right to be named as an equal with Moses and Aaron.

Miriam, the respected leader

Miriam demonstrates many aspects of leadership in the texts that carry her story. As the sister who saved Moses, the woman who led the celebration of victory that marked the escape of the Israelites from slavery, the first person in the Bible to be called a prophet and the leader who had the courage to criticize another member of the leadership team, she epitomizes the different roles that one woman can play as a respected leader. She is not just a leader for the women in the wilderness community, she has earned the respect of both women and men. The refusal of the entire community to journey on until Miriam was healed of her illness is another testimony to her standing. The reference to her in Micah 6.4 reconfirms the status and role given to her by the whole community. It also identifies Yahweh’s choice of Miriam to play an important role in the saving of the people of Israel.

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Miriam's association with the religious practices of the community are attested to in the references to her genealogy in Numbers 26.59 and 1 Chronicles 6.3. The recording of Miriam's death in Kadesh (Num 20.1) attests to her significant role. Moses and Aaron are the only two other members of this community who have their deaths recorded in the Pentateuch.

Miriam's recognition as a respected leader in her community was not an overnight event. It was a growing process that began in the early years of her life. Circumstances, and perhaps people, recognized and used her skills and gifts as the occasion demanded. If Miriam had said "No!" or held back because she was "only a woman" – a

phrase heard many times when women are called to lead – she might have lost the opportunity to make a difference as a leader. Her role as a leader for the whole community indicates her acceptance by the men as well as the women. It is possible that there were men, including her two brothers, who also encouraged and supported her as prophet and leader. Her ability to receive affirmation and to be focused on the tasks with which she was confronted, would have played a significant part in the respect and authority she had among her people.

For practical work on this study see Module I: Activity 5 in the Manual.

Module

Handout Ila-5

A relationship between equals: The Creation stories

Text

Genesis 1.1-2.4a; 2.4b-2.25

Background to Genesis

The book of Genesis is a book about beginnings. It contains descriptions of the beginning of the universe and stories about God's relationship with Abraham and his family and the covenant God made with the people of Israel. It is also a book about other relationships: God's relationship with the universe; God's relationship with two created human beings; the relationship between these two human beings, and their relationship with God and the universe.

Genesis is the first book in the Bible and the first of the five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) that are referred to as the Pentateuch. The word Pentateuch is derived from a Greek word meaning "the fivefold book". The word was probably first used about the 2nd century CE. These five books are also known as "The Torah", meaning the law, as well as "The Five Books of Moses", although scholars now recognize that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch.

Who wrote Genesis?

Through the work of many historians, archaeologists and biblical scholars, it is now believed that the stories in Genesis were gathered during the period in which some Israelite tribes were

in exile in Babylon, while others still lived under Babylonian rule in their own lands about 605 BCE. The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II in 587 BCE. To the Hebrew people Babylonia had become the "super power" that had destroyed their lands and oppressed their people. Many scholars claim that the creation narratives were written as an attempt to heal the misery and pain of an oppressed and homeless community. They probably brought stability to the oppressed Hebrew people by bringing order to the chaos in which they lived and by reaffirming God's relationship with the universe and with human-kind.

The stories found in Genesis had survived over centuries through oral communication. They had been told and retold within Hebrew communities. It is now accepted by scholars, exegetes and theologians that the stories in Genesis were collected from three main sources and were written in the current format by a redactor (editor). The sources were: P the Priestly source; J the Yahwist Source; and E the Elohist source. The drawing together of these three main sources probably took over five hundred years, reaching completion in the post-exilic period of Israel's history.

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Why are there two Creation stories?

There is no evidence to prove that the accounts of creation as found in Genesis 1.1-2.4a and Genesis 2.4b-2.25 were two parts of one account of the forming of the universe. It is quite possible that the two creation stories were compiled by two different writers with different intentions and for different audiences. The sources used by the male redactor were: P (the Priestly source) for the creation hymn in 1.1-2.4a and J (the Yahwist source) for the account in vv.2.4b-2.25.

Genesis 1.1-2.4a: This is a well-structured account of the many acts of creation. With the use of repetition, rhythm and concise statements, the account appears to be similar to a hymn or a liturgical meditation. God, the central figure in the account, is seen as:

- God the Maker or Creator who establishes order within the universe.
- God the Speaker whose words affirm goodness as an integral part of creation.
- God the Name-giver who gives identity to all that was created.
- God the Sanctifier who blesses the created human species as well as the day that was set aside to honour all that was created.

The creation of humankind (vv.1.26-30): A greater amount of time has been given to the analysis of these verses and to the establishing of the authority of humankind than to establishing the authority of God as the Creator of humankind as well as all of creation. Consequently much has been written about the meaning and implications

for humankind of being made in “God’s image”.

This phrase is often interpreted to justify:

- a) patriarchal concepts that place the ownership of all created matter, including women and children, under the headship of men;
- b) the exercise of power-over as a male prerogative; and
- c) the control of the weak and helpless as a form of caring that legitimizes dominance and oppression. Such interpretations for humankind being made in God’s image denies the central focus of God’s relationship with God’s created beings. In creating human beings God established a relationship between God and the two persons who were created (v.26). God also established a relationship between the two persons who were created by God (v.28). A third relationship was also established between the created persons and the rest of the universe (v.29). In creating humankind in God’s image, God must have believed that humans would be capable of loving as God does, caring as God does, and exercising power as justice for all, as God does.

In the first account of the creation of human beings, nothing is said about one person being superior to the other. Nothing is said about the roles of the two created beings. Nothing is said about the authority of one over the other. What is described is the task that is entrusted to **both** created beings: to care for all that has been created by God. The trust that God extends to humans in entrusting them to care for all that has

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been created by God is clearly visible in this task. Why would God imply “dominance” (v.26) to mean ownership, control and destructive power over all that has been pronounced as “good” by God? The second task entrusted to both created beings was to reproduce other humans. This is also the task of all other species created by God. The act of reproduction is dependent on both male and female in all species, including the human species. God then blesses this biological task (v.28). Nothing is said here about marriage or the role and function of husband and wife. The writer of this account seems to be concerned with establishing the working of nature rather than the placing of the narrative in a cultural setting.

The first account of the creation, therefore, can be read as a liturgical hymn describing God as One who:

- loves and cares for all of creation
- creates humankind to reflect God’s love and caring for all of creation, and
- makes right relations central to the well-being of all of creation.

By recording the creation of the universe in this manner, the Priestly writer seems to present to the Israelite community living in exile and to those who were suffering oppression, the image of a loving God who was creator, sustainer, nurturer and the source from whom all goodness flowed.

The second account of the creation (Genesis 2.4b-25): The second creation account has been attributed to the Yahwist source J. There are significant similarities between the first and

second accounts of creation. God is the central figure in both accounts. It is God who creates all the universe, including the male and female figures. It is God who creates the garden into which both persons are placed. It is God who creates the male figure from the earth and the female figure from bone. It is God who gives life to all created species including the two human figures. It is God who establishes a relationship between all the species, the environment, human beings and God.

Some significant differences between the first and the second account are:

- the shift in the order in which all species were created, and the placing of a greater emphasis on the creation of the two humans on the sixth day;
- the creation of the man before the garden is created and placing the man in the garden to care for and maintain it;
- the location of the creation process in a specific land “Eden” and the reference to the geography of Eden (vv.10a-14);
- the naming of all creatures by the man, rather than by God who created them;
- the naming of the woman by the man, rather than by God who created her and breathed life into her;
- the detailed account of the creation of the woman;
- the introduction of unity and separation as a component of creation (v.24).

These differences in the two accounts suggest that each account should be accepted as a separate

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account of creation. The second account should not be taken as an extension of the first account. The second account is best addressed together with the detailed account of the activities of the male and female figures in Genesis chapter 3. When these two sections, Genesis 2.4b-3.24, are addressed together it is possible to read the complete story of all that affected the lives of these two first human beings and the consequences of the choices they made to the well-being of the rest of creation. These two sections are not about the domination of man over woman or the disobedience of the woman that resulted in the “fall” of humankind. The two chapters bring us face to face with the manner in which God set human beings free to make choices and the resulting break in relationships as a consequence of disobedience to God. Both man and woman are responsible for disobeying God. The woman is not judged until the man has also eaten of the forbidden fruit. Both are seen as acting in full knowledge of the prohibition that God imposed and the consequences of such disobedience. It is the disobedience of both that breaks the harmony within all creation. Their disobedience also separates them from their creator: God. For the man the sign of the broken relationship with God is to be expressed in pain from labouring to make a living (vv.17-19). For the woman the sign of the broken relationship with God is to be expressed in the pain of her labour in childbirth (v.16).

The broken relationship between God and the two human beings goes a further step in chapter 3. The companionship established by God between the male and the female when they were created

is also broken. The man’s partner or helper as described in the first and second account of the creation is now moved into a position of subordination. The consequence of disobedience to God has created a separation between man and woman. The partner (man) has become the master of the one who was his equal (woman).

The reading of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 together seems to reflect the broken relationship between God and Israel during this period of exile. The existing patriarchal social patterns are reflected in the roles and social behaviour of the man and the woman, now estranged from God. Hierarchical patterns of power and dominance that were part of Hebrew society were woven into this expansion of the creation narratives. God’s vision for an interrelated universe, living in harmony, is now replaced by sin, separation and death.

Why are these creation stories used to create negative images of women?

A variety of interpretations giving women a negative image have evolved through history. All cultures perpetuate myths about women’s sexuality and their role in society. Some are positive images, but most are negative. In Christian culture women have been portrayed in two significant ways:

- 1) The role of the woman in the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden has been emphasized as being greater than the role of the man. The woman has been named as a temptress, a troublemaker and the person

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responsible for the breakdown in the relationship between the two sexes. As Christian theology has developed, this interpretation has reached almost canonical status.

- 2) **All** women are often represented by **one** woman.

Following these responses to Genesis 1-3, the Old Testament continued its largely negative interpretation of the role of women in the history of Israel. Much of this was also due to the influence of other anti-female traditions that existed outside Hebrew culture. Eve has emerged as the prototype for all women and has been used as a mirror to reflect negative values and attitudes about women, especially within the Christian tradition. Throughout church history many leading reformers and scholars continued to interpret Old Testament and New Testament references to women within the traditional interpretation of the woman in the creation narratives.

Why are the creation narratives used to justify the subordination of women?

Here again the focus for interpretation is on the woman rather than on God who, like a parent, cares for all that was created, especially for the two who were made in God's image. The justification for women's subordinate position is based on a literal reading of the texts concerned. In the second creation narrative it appears as though the woman was created last in the order of creation. Man was created first, then all other species and then the woman last. No thought is given as to why the woman was created. Again in

focusing on the order in which all species were created it is easy to lose sight of the intent of the Creator. The intent of the Creator, like a good and caring parent, was to make sure that the man did not live alone and that there was companionship for him. It was also necessary that the man have a partner so that procreation could occur. This was already established in all other species. There are no reasons at all in this narrative to justify the subordination of women. The creation of two beings to be partners in the tending of creation and together being responsible for the increasing of the human population seems to be the intent in the second narrative. In the first narrative there is no hierarchical order in the creation of the male and female. If a hierarchical order is to be read into the first narrative, then the male and female should be subordinate to all other species who were created first. Yet there is no evidence of such an argument in Christian theology. The creation of humans is often referred to as the climax of God's great creative action. However, the creation of the woman as the last, in the second narrative, is not referred to as the climax of God's great creative action! The argument for her subordinate role and status is often the argument expressed loudly and clearly rather than her identity as a person made in God's image.

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How do we interpret the creation narratives?

An unbiased reading of Genesis 1, 2 and 3 can help us focus on the following:

- 1) God created both male and female and breathed life into both of them.
- 2) There is no evidence for specific female or male roles.
- 3) Both humans were created, as were all other species, to procreate and fill the earth.
- 4) Both humans were given the task of caring for the earth.
- 5) Neither of the humans was given a superior status until both disobeyed God. They were created for companionship and partnership.
- 6) Both humans were blessed by God.
- 7) Both humans and all of creation were pronounced as “good” by God.
- 8) It was through the disobedience of both humans that broken relationships and sin entered God’s good creation.
- 9) The responsibility for disharmony in creation rests with both humans.
- 10) The interpretation of the role of Eve as the initiator of disobedience and the embodiment of temptation seems to reflect the cultural and social roles imposed on women through history.
- 11) The subordination of women and children to men that has existed in many cultures seems to be legitimized in the Christian culture through the narrative in Genesis 3.
- 12) The male head of the family as evidenced in society seems to be superimposed on God, thereby creating a male God who acts in similar ways to the male head of a family, rather than the male reflecting the nature of God, as seems to be intended in the creation of male and female in God’s image.

As women and men work towards establishing and maintaining a partnership between equals, it is helpful to focus on the creation narratives as God’s vision for an interrelated creation in which women and men reflect God’s image as it was seen “in the beginning”. Superimposing our image of ourselves on God is a reversal of the original intentions that lie at the heart of the phrase “made in God’s image”. Our cultural, social and religious interpretations of gender are often used as distorted mirrors to reflect God’s image. To reread and reinterpret the two creation narratives as God’s vision for a fully integrated and harmonious universe, where women and men as equals respond to God’s command to care and love all of creation, could be an important force in the building of a truly inclusive community and in working to heal a broken creation, so as to recreate the safe and “good” universe created by God.

For practical work on this study see Module IIa Activity 4 in the Manual.

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Handout IIb-4

Overcoming gender bias: Mary Magdalene

Texts

Mark 15.40,47; 16.1-9

Matthew 27.56,61; 28.1-20

Luke 8.1-3; 24.10

John 19.25; 20.1,11-18

Reflections and background for the Bible study

Mary Magdalene is the only woman disciple of Jesus mentioned in all four gospels. The name “Magdalene” is believed to be derived from “Magdala”, which was the name of a city located on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. A number of women named Mary are mentioned in the gospels, so by attaching the word “Magdala” to her name, her identity was set apart from the other Marys. The name of Mary Magdala became Mary Magdalene as various translations of the Bible evolved.

Magdala was said to be a notorious fishing village that was destroyed about 75 CE because of the licentious behaviour of its people. It is possible that the reference in Luke 8.1-3, “Mary Magdalene from whom seven demons had come out...” was based on the reputation of her home village.

In all four gospels Mary Magdalene is the only woman who is not identified through a relationship with another person, such as a husband, sister, mother or brother.

What do the gospels say about Mary Magdalene?

Mark

References to Mary Magdalene are found in:

vv.15.40,47 – at the crucifixion

vv.16.1-8 – at Jesus’ resurrection

v.16.9 – this is believed to be a later addition

There are no references to Mary Magdalene in the early records of Jesus’ ministry in Mark. Her first appearance is at Jesus’ crucifixion, where she is named first among the group of women who followed Jesus. Together with the other women, she is credited with providing for Jesus’ needs when he was in Galilee (v.15.41). She is also mentioned before Mary, Jesus’ Mother, as one of the witnesses to his place of burial (v.15.47). By mentioning Mary Magdalene first, Mark seems to stress her leading role among the group of women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body and then became the first to receive the news of Jesus’ resurrection (v.16.1-8).

Chapter 16.9 onwards records a summary of the resurrection and some of Jesus’ appearances to the male disciples. However, Mary Magdalene is once again mentioned by name and identified as the woman from “whom he had cast out seven demons” (v.9).

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Matthew

References to Mary Magdalene are found in vv.28.1-10 – Jesus' resurrection

Mary Magdalene is mentioned by name as being among a group of women standing at a distance at Jesus' crucifixion. As in the Markan account, they are identified as providing for Jesus (v.27.56). Matthew has Joseph of Arimathea together with Mary Magdalene and one other Mary present at the tomb. The two women are left alone "sitting opposite the tomb" (v.27.61). These two Marys are the only two present at the tomb at dawn on the Sabbath morning. The two of them receive the news of the resurrection and are commanded to go and tell the disciples (v.28.1-10). It is not clear as to why Matthew placed only Mary Magdalene and one other Mary at the place of burial when he had named her first among the women who were at the crucifixion. The task of proclamation is clearly assigned to these two women, with Mary Magdalene taking the more prominent role (v.28.10).

Luke

References to Mary Magdalene are found in: vv.8.1-3 – as the woman from whom seven demons were removed and who followed Jesus. vv.23.55-24.11 – Jesus' burial and resurrection

Mary Magdalene is the first woman named as a follower of Jesus (v.8.2). She is the first named woman to be healed by Jesus, when she had "seven demons" sent out of her (v.8.2). She is named first among the women who

were present at the resurrection and who related the events that had occurred at the tomb to the disciples (vv.23.50-24.10). She was not believed by the eleven male disciples. They felt it was an "idle tale" (v.24.11).

John

References to Mary Magdalene are found in: vv.19.25-27 – Jesus' death

vv.20.1-18 – Jesus' resurrection

In John's gospel the presence of women is referred to only in passing (v.19.25)

Mary Magdalene is listed last with the names of two women from Jesus' family: Mary, his mother and Mary, his aunt. By placing her with the members of Jesus' family, she is given a special place in Jesus' life. John does not refer to her as being among the group of women followers, as is the case in the other gospels. The authenticity of her presence among the followers of Jesus is, however, legitimized when John claims the presence of "the disciple whom he (Jesus) loved" standing beside them (v.19.26). Commentators and exegetes have accepted this to be an eyewitness account of the presence of Mary Magdalene and her significant role in the life and ministry of Jesus. More than in the previous gospels, John records with great detail the presence of a heartbroken Mary Magdalene alone at the tomb. He also records a dramatic unfolding of the resurrection revelation to Mary Magdalene (vv.20.1-18). More details are added to the final events when Peter and "the one whom Jesus loved most" ran back to the empty tomb with Mary Magdalene. It is only when they see the empty linen wrappings that they

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believe her story that he has been taken away. Gender bias is visible once again.

Jesus contradicts male disbelief by appearing to Mary after the men have departed. He not only calls Mary by name, but also instructs her to inform the disciples that he is ascending to “my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (v.20.17). Only John records her actual words to the disciples: “I have seen the Lord” (v.20.18).

Jesus’ instruction to Mary that she should not touch him (v.20.17) has been used by some early church fathers to validate their position on the subordination of women. They argue that because she was a woman and therefore “unclean”, Jesus prevented her from touching him, although he permits a male disciple Thomas to touch his wounds. This incident has also been used by medieval church fathers to endorse their stand against the ordination of women, claiming that only men should be the proclaimers of the good news of the resurrection of Christ. However there is no evidence in any of the four gospels to support a subordinate position for women. The women disciples of Jesus were never placed in positions of subordination to the male disciples.

Why is Mary Magdalene’s name missing in the Acts of the Apostles?

Acts 1.4 has the only mention of the women who were with Jesus during the crucifixion and resurrection. But Mary Magdalene is not mentioned by name. Only Mary, the mother of Jesus

and “certain other women” are mentioned. Since she was known to the writers of the four gospels and given a prominent position among the women disciples, why was she not mentioned in the book of Acts?

Despite Mary’s role in the events following the resurrection of Jesus and despite being the first to witness to his living presence, the Christian community that grew around the disciples seemed to have reverted back to existing cultural practices by confining women to the background. The written records in the New Testament, other than the four gospels, ceased to mention the presence of women as followers of Jesus. Mary Magdalene’s voice disappeared into silence, until she emerged again in a vastly different role around the 3rd century CE. She was no longer a disciple or apostle. She was the repentant sinner, the prostitute and the adulteress.

Why is Mary Magdalene sometimes referred to as a sinner, a prostitute and an adulteress in early Christian writings?

- 1) The stories of three women in the gospel records seem to have been woven together to create a composite image of Mary Magdalene: Mary of Bethany (John 12.1-8); the unnamed woman in Luke 7.36-50; the unnamed woman in Mark 14.3-9 and Matthew 26.6-13. The above three women were all credited with the anointing of Jesus.
- 2) The story of the woman who sinned in Luke 7.36-50 is recorded immediately before Luke’s record of the healing of Mary

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Magdalene, from whom seven demons were exorcized.

- 3) The presence of demons in women was interpreted as an indication of sinfulness in women.
- 4) Therefore, since the story of a woman possessed by demons follows the story of an unnamed woman who was known to be a sinner, Mary Magdalene was identified as the sinner in Luke 7.36-50. There is no evidence, other than a gender bias on the part of male interpreters and many early church fathers, for making this assumption.
- 5) Once Mary Magdalene's identity was interwoven with this unnamed sinner, it was a natural progression to identify her with the other women who also anointed Jesus as recorded in Mark 14.3-9, Matthew 26.6-13 and with Mary of Bethany in John 12.1-8.
- 6) Identifying her as a sinner gained more credence as she was linked to the penitential tears and the wiping of Jesus' feet with her hair by the unnamed woman in Luke 7.36-50. In medieval times the weeping of women was a requirement in the act of penitence. The strength of the weeping was associated with the depth of the sins for which forgiveness was required. When Mary Magdalene was linked to this unnamed woman, she also took on the mantle of sinfulness with which Luke's unnamed woman was clothed.
- 7) Using many of these myths that were circulating around the 2nd century CE, many artists and sculptors created images of Mary Magdalene as a beautiful, sensual, fallen woman. Her sexuality was depicted through

a variety of suggestive postures and a flowing mantle of beautiful hair.

- 8) The image of the adulteress became attached to her during medieval times when the woman caught in adultery in John 8.3 was also presumed to be Mary Magdalene, since the label of prostitution was already circulating around her. Adultery and prostitution were accepted as being synonymous.

From the Middle Ages till the late 19th century, Mary Magdalene was often portrayed as a contrast for the church's veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She seemed to epitomize the woman as sinner, while Mary, the mother of Jesus epitomized the saint. In the writings of many of the early churches the two Marys were polarized. In all of these roles, Mary Magdalene's penitence, and her need for repentance and protection by the church was emphasized. These expectations were also extended to include all women as persons who needed to repent for their sinfulness which was caused by their femaleness or sexuality. All women, therefore, needed to seek the protection of the church and its patriarchal culture.

Much of this trend in interpretation underscores the attitudes against women's attempts to reclaim their identity within a patriarchal Christian culture. When women are denied the right to ordination they are also being denied the right to proclaim the gospel, as Mary Magdalene was commanded to do. The theology that developed around Mary Magdalene continues to keep her silent, except when she is remembered at Easter services.

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Recent scholarship has rescued Mary Magdalene from many of the negative images imposed on her by returning to the four gospels and other fragments of manuscripts belonging to the 1st and 2nd centuries. She has been restored to her role as the leader of the group of women disciples who followed Jesus during his lifetime. She is also celebrated as the first witness to the resurrection and as an Apostle to the Apostles. She has been reclaimed as the woman who received the good news and then proclaimed it, making her the role model for women seeking ordination in the church. She is now free of the gender bias that kept her chained to the patriarchal interpretation of her role. She has been restored as a leader among the disciples who followed Jesus.

Reclaiming authority, not gender, as leaders

The exercise of authority and leadership by Mary Magdalene was different from that of Peter. While Peter claimed a leadership role by virtue of his position among the disciples and Jesus' dialogue with him (Mathew 16.13-19), Mary Magdalene claims her authority through the tasks she undertook as a disciple. Her presence during many crucial events in Jesus' life, culmi-

nating in his post-resurrection revelation to her, give her the same authority and status as Peter and Paul. The recognition of Mary as a figure of authority because Jesus authorized her to go and tell the good news, is another example that the task to which women and men are called is of greater importance than gender. The challenge to all churches to rise above gender bias, or social and cultural taboos, and to choose leaders for the tasks to be done must be taken seriously.

Faced with the choice of silence or being the voice for the risen Christ, Mary chooses to speak. She has to choose between speech and silence in the knowledge that her gender and the culture of her society will be an obstacle to her being accepted as an equal in the early Christian community. She chooses speech. Her determination to follow Jesus' commands shows her to be a woman of strength and courage. She stands today as a symbol of courage, independence, faith and love and is an inspiration to all, especially to women, who chose to become disciples of Christ.

For practical work on this study see Module IIb: Activity 4 in the Manual.

Module 3

Handout III issue 3-3

Identity and difference
in partnership:
The Canaanite woman

Texts

Matthew 15.21-28**(Parallel text: Mark 7.24-30)**

Background to Matthew

This gospel was probably written about 90 CE. The evidence of a clearly defined theological perspective and an understanding of rabbinic teachings in the gospel point to the probability that the writer was a Jewish Christian, perhaps from the second generation of Christians. The community for whom this gospel was written was located in a prosperous, Greek speaking, urban area where people were facing hostility from those outside the community. The writer has used two sources as the basis for this gospel: the gospel of Mark and a collection called Q that records some of Jesus' sayings.

The central theme of the gospel is that in Jesus, who is the Son of God, the Kingdom or rule of God is present here and now. It emphasizes the urgency of the need to become disciples of Jesus and to engage in the mission of bringing all people to God, through Jesus.

Who was this unnamed woman?

- She came from Syrophenicia, in Canaan, which was in Gentile territory.
- There is no indication as to what her religion was. She probably worshipped some of the Greek gods and goddesses who were popular in the region.

- Because she was a Gentile woman she would have been considered unclean by the Jews.
- She was searching for healing for her daughter who was also labelled unclean because of her illness.
- She could be identified by the Jews as being a "triple outsider" on the grounds of ethnicity, culture and religion.
- She appears out of nowhere and disappears again after achieving her goal.
- There is no evidence in the text to indicate if she became a follower of Jesus after she returned to her healed daughter.

Why is this encounter included
by the two gospel writers?

- Her encounter with Jesus is placed in a section dealing with issues of purity that were important in the Jewish community.
- Jesus has just completed a teaching that emphasized the fact that purity was not achieved through the observation of laws alone, but that purity related to what comes from within a person.
- To further reinforce Jesus' teaching the writer uses this unnamed, unclean woman from Canaan to confront Jesus.
- After a rather sensitive dialogue with her, Jesus grants her request.
- He then confirms his mission as one that is to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

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- This is the only instance in the gospels when silence was Jesus' first response to a request for healing.

What made this woman different?

- She represented people who were culturally, ethnically and religiously different from Jesus.
- She refused to accept "no" as an answer from the disciples.
- She was unafraid to shout and attract Jesus' attention, although her gender and culture expected her to obey the disciples' order to be silent.
- She did not accept Jesus' silence when she first approached him with her request to heal her daughter.
- She continued to argue her case.
- She met Jesus' argument for confining his mission to Jews alone, with her own argument for inclusion.
- Though she acknowledged him as a religious teacher and healer she did not weep and wail and plead as she dialogued with him, especially when he claimed that "it was not fair to take the children's food and then give it to the dogs".
- She turns Jesus' argument back on him. By using her mind and her skill with words she stands her ground.
- She was single-minded in her goal – the healing of her daughter.
- She risks Jesus' anger and rejection by refusing to give in.

- Her strong faith in herself and the ability of the healer – Jesus – to heal her daughter although she was not present, is the foundation for her determination to succeed.

- She faces Jesus as a woman of strength, secure in herself and in her ability to persuade, confront and achieve her goal.

What part do identity and difference play in this encounter?

- Jesus and the woman came from different racial origins and religious beliefs.
- The woman claims the right to be different from Jesus. She makes no apology for being an outsider.
- Jesus claims his Jewish identity as the reason for not granting her request.
- Both Jesus and the woman permit themselves to place their viewpoints side by side.
- Neither seems to want to gain control over the other.
- Neither works towards dominating the other.
- Jesus uses his healing power to grant her request.
- The woman uses her verbal power to guide Jesus into declaring his mission to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.
- Identity and difference are not used by Jesus or the woman to polarize or form a wall of separation between them.
- Identity and difference are used to establish right relations between Jesus and the woman.
- Identity and difference form the foundation for being connected.

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What attitudes contribute to building a partnership between equals?

- Each person needs to be able to affirm herself or himself as being of equal value.
- Each person needs to be secure in her/his own identity, which includes race, ethnicity, tribe, caste, culture, and sex.
- Each person needs to be prepared to support the other and acknowledge difference as power to relate to the other.
- Each person needs to own power as transforming power and not as controlling power.

For practical work on this study see Module III Issue 3 Activity 3 in the Manual.

Module 4

Handout IV-2

Different and equal: Martha and Mary

Texts

Luke 10.38-42

John 11.1-45, 12.1-7

Background to Luke

Tradition traces the authorship of Luke's gospel to Luke who is believed to have been a friend and companion of Paul, the Apostle. Luke was a Greek who was a physician by profession. The writing of the gospel has been dated to about the mid-80s CE. It is a gospel that has many themes. It is also sometimes referred to as the "women's gospel" since it contains the greatest number of stories about women and their response to Jesus. To understand better what the writer is attempting to say, it is useful to read a block of sections or a whole chapter as one unit. For instance, by reading all of the chapters that deal with the teaching of disciples and the cost of discipleship, it is possible to find the common theme that runs through the whole chapter.

Background to John

There is no historical evidence to indicate who was the real writer of this gospel. Tradition has named it as John's gospel because of its references to the "beloved" disciple of Jesus, who was believed to be the disciple John. By examining various events recorded in the text, it is believed that the writing took place in the 80s or 90s CE. This gospel differs greatly from the other three gospels in fairly significant ways. In John Jesus has a three-year ministry and a one-year ministry in the other three gospels.

John also records three different Passover meals, while the other three gospels record one Passover meal. In John the crucifixion has a different order of events than in Matthew, Mark and Luke. There are differences in the parables and some of Jesus' teachings which include long segments on teachings. The most significant of these long teachings is Jesus' farewell discourse and prayer which make up four chapters in the gospel (chapters 14-17).

What is the significance of the Martha/Mary episode in Luke chapter 10?

Chapter 10 has a theme of "journeys" running through it: seventy-two disciples are sent on a mission journey; the story of the Good Samaritan is the story of a traveller; and Martha and Mary were visited by Jesus as he travelled through the village of Bethany. The chapter also highlights the themes of the call to discipleship and the choices involved in responding to Jesus' call to love God and one's neighbour. The parable of the Good Samaritan and the visit with Martha and Mary complement each other. The Good Samaritan demonstrates a model for loving one's neighbour. Mary sits at Jesus' feet like a true (male) disciple, to learn from the master. Both the Good Samaritan and Mary broke the accepted social codes and boundaries.

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Chapter 10 is also about training for discipleship. The writer begins with the training and teaching of the seventy-two persons sent out in pairs by Jesus. There is no indication as to whether women were included among them. However, since the four Gospels witness to the presence of a group of women among Jesus' followers, it is safe to assume that there would have been some women among the seventy-two being sent out. The writer then moves on to the teaching of a lawyer. In this section, there is a cast of male characters: the lawyer and all the characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Following this section comes the teaching of Mary and the visit to the home of Martha. Here there is a pair of women as the focus of Jesus' teaching. It is quite possible that the writer felt the need to include an example that would point to the discipleship of women within a chapter that dealt primarily with the training of disciples.

Was Martha a stereotype for women serving or an example of discipleship?

Most commentaries treat verse 38 as one that identifies the locality or setting for the encounter. Martha, as the owner of her home despite the presence of a brother, had the right to be viewed as a woman of authority who was also the head of a household. Such a view of Martha would make her a role model for authority, rather than a role model for homemaking and for carrying out housekeeping tasks within the life of the church. Unfortunately most studies of Martha in this encounter focus on her role as a homemaker and not as a homeowner.

This more traditional view of Martha, as one who was tied to domesticity, has often become the role model for women extending their domestic role into the life of the church.

Martha is portrayed in verse 40 as the complainant. She appeals to Jesus to arbitrate in her resentment against her sister. The wording of the text continues to be interpreted to show Martha as the busy homemaker who had lost sight of her priorities. She would like Jesus to vindicate and affirm her contribution. This would also then vindicate the service role as the primary responsibility of women within the work of the church.

Women from very traditional cultures in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific are sometimes puzzled by this verse. It does not quite fit the accepted behaviour codes between two sisters and an unrelated male. A workshop participant made the observation that if she had any complaints about her sister, she might see her pastor privately and ask for advice on how to deal with a "lazy" sister. Her first preference, however, would be to go to another woman in the family circle rather than to a male outsider. What is more difficult to accept is Martha's offer of hospitality combined with a complaint about behaviour and then her expecting the honoured guest to arbitrate in the matter.

A further observation is related to Mary's silence in the face of Martha's words. In many traditional cultures it was most probable that the younger sister would not challenge her

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older sister in the presence of an outsider. She would remain silent and perhaps challenge her sister at a more private time. Martha was the mother figure in the family and as such Mary would hesitate to be disrespectful towards her older sister. Hence Mary's silence.

In verses 41-42 the encounter between Jesus and the two sisters reaches a climax with Jesus' words to Martha which are traditionally interpreted to favour Mary's way of contemplative discipleship as being of a higher value than Martha's way which was reflected in "fretting and fussing about so many things" (NEB translation). Jesus' response has been used to validate the participation of women in the church as that of silence or of serving men.

Jesus' use of the words "chosen the better part" has challenged scholars in the rereading of this text. An important factor towards the understanding of these words has been the need to eliminate the stereotyping of women's ministries based on these verses.

Was Mary a stereotype for women's subdued participation or a role model for active discipleship?

The interpretation of verse 39 has been used to legitimize the role of women in church ministry. All translations create the image of Mary, the silent listener, taking full advantage of Jesus' visit to learn from him. She continues to be the model for women's participation in the church as the adoring, silent receiver of the word.

In contrast to Martha, Mary comes across as the stereotypical, modest, gentle, adoring woman absorbing all that Jesus was teaching her. Her posture in this episode makes her the acceptable image for women's behaviour in the church. She sits in silence while she is reprimanded by her sister. She sits in silence while Jesus goes to her defence. Her silence has been interpreted as a role model for Christian women to follow, especially within the "family" of the church. Her silence has also been associated with negative attitudes towards the ordination of women. The image of a woman sitting at the feet of a man has also reinforced some of the gender bias attached to the active participation of women in decision-making processes. By attaching such negative images to this episode there is a significant loss in the understanding of true discipleship. The stereotyping of these two sisters denies them their identity as women in training for discipleship.

The phrase used by Luke to describe Mary's posture: "...who sat at the Lord's feet" (v.39) warrants more than a literal interpretation. Sitting at the feet of a teacher is a figurative form for identifying a person who is a student. It is very probable that Luke is referring to training for discipleship by learning from her teacher. It is also possible that "the one thing needful" that Jesus referred to when he responded to Martha's comments meant that Mary had chosen to make learning her priority rather than using her time in domestic matters. Here Jesus seems to be endorsing a choice, which Martha could have followed as well, to make the most of the teacher's visit and not limit herself because of domestic duties.

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The stereotyping of the two sisters is not just a male interpretation of this episode. There are some women who claim that they are like Martha and that their role in a church community is to carry out the domestic tasks that need to be done to keep a community cared for “like Martha”! They pride themselves on tasks such as washing the communion glasses, tidying the sanctuary, and working on a flower-roster as representing the ideal role for women in the church. By interpreting Martha in this manner, they are devaluing Martha’s identity. They also place her tasks as being of less value than Mary’s actions in the story. Thus Mary is stereotyped to represent the thinking woman who is given a higher value than the “practical” Martha. This kind of interpretation by women denies both sisters the right to be different and equal. It refuses to validate the combination of “thinking” and “doing” as integral to true discipleship.

Why are Martha and Mary presented differently in John’s Gospel?

In John’s gospel the two sisters emerge as disciples who have grown stronger in their faith. As in the Lukan episode Jesus comes to them once again. At no time does either of the gospels show Martha and Mary looking for Jesus. In both episodes Jesus comes to them. By doing this Jesus seems to endorse their roles in his ministry. He shows a deep appreciation for their friendship. Although Lazarus’ death is the reason for Jesus’ visit, it is with Martha and Mary that Jesus interacts the most.

In John the two sisters are portrayed in a different light. Martha has the greater role. Her anger and impatience with Jesus for his delay in responding to their cry for help when their brother was critically ill was obvious. Martha’s impatience is a measure of the depth of her friendship with Jesus. Her declaration of faith and her stand in proclaiming Jesus as “the Messiah, the Son of God, the One coming into the world” is equal to the great confession of Peter (v.11.27). By placing this important declaration on the lips of a woman (Martha), this male writer (John) endorses the important role played by women in the life and ministry of Jesus. Her confession lifts Martha into the area of intellectual discernment and unconditional faith. She is as much a true disciple as Peter or any of the other male disciples. It is essential that the Martha in John’s gospel be recognized as an example of discipleship and not be lost in the stereotyping that has been extended to the same Martha in Luke’s gospel.

Mary, too, greets Jesus with words of impatience (v.32). She has not been inactive while she waited. Together with a group of Jews (very likely women) she has been in the house, perhaps carrying through the burial rituals that surround a death. Her affirmation of Jesus’ ability to restore her brother is not as aggressive as Martha’s. But it is her tears that trigger Jesus’ tearful response to the death of his friend Lazarus (vv.11.33-35). Once again this gospel draws attention to the close relationship between these two sisters and Jesus. There seems to be an easy acceptance and familiarity that is often visible between close friends.

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It is in the chapter that follows these events that Mary arrives alone on centre stage (vv.12.1-8). Martha is once again serving a meal to Jesus, Lazarus, Judas Iscariot and possibly other disciples, although they are not mentioned explicitly in the text. It is a scene that is similar to Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his arrest. This is his last meal in a home that perhaps has become very familiar to him. It is here that two significant acts take place. Mary's tears fall on Jesus' feet and she wipes them with her hair. Then she anoints his head with an expensive ointment. Her act of bathing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair would have been considered a very sensual act. It also replicated the washing of his disciples' feet by Jesus, before his last meal with them. Her act of anointing Jesus' head was a ritual that was associated with death. It was also an action that was carried out at the enthronement of kings. Mary's action symbolized the kingship of Jesus as well as foretold his impending death. These symbolic acts of Mary are not included in any of the other gospels. Only John records these events. John also makes these contrasts:

- Mary as the faithful disciple / Judas as the unfaithful disciple.
- Mary responds to Jesus' impending suffering by buying an expensive jar of ointment with which to anoint him / Judas responds with disdain.
- Mary's actions are a symbol of love / Judas' action leads to betrayal.

Martha and Mary: Different and equal

Mary and Martha should not be used as role models for polarizing or stereotyping roles within the ministry of the church. They are both different from each other but equal in their roles of discipleship and leadership. Neither one is exclusive of the other nor do they stand on their own. Neither is of greater importance than the other. It does not deny one or the other being the server or the listener. Both sisters were equal in their friendship with Jesus. They related to him as separate individuals as well as sisters.

Martha and Mary were both affirmed by Jesus. Martha's proclamation of Jesus as the resurrection and life (John 17.45) and Mary's training for discipleship "at his feet" are of equal value. The existence of a house church named "Martha's House" has been recorded in early Christian literature.

Luke and John seem to present two different portraits of the two sisters. Luke seems to favour the traditional role for women's discipleship as he presents Mary as the silent listener who wins Jesus' approval. The traditional homemaker, Martha, seems to be gently reprimanded by Jesus whereas John presents Martha as a disciple who is competent, practical and independent. He presents Mary as courageous, independent, and sensitive and one whose intuition leads her to minister to Jesus as he faces crucifixion. Placed side by side, Mary and Martha emphasize the different ways in which women can exercise discipleship.

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The understanding of “service” and “being served” has to be seen beyond the context of domestic duties. Service and being served are components of active participation in the Kingdom of God. Such service is not determined by gender, but by response, in faith, to the call to discipleship. Cultural understandings of the ways in which women are expected to “serve” husbands, fathers, male bosses and others in the patriarchal hierarchies that structure society, have unfortunately played a significant part in the church’s interpretation of the service that women offer to the church. In accepting these patriarchal interpretations, women negate their ability to be equal to men

in exercising all aspects of ministry in the church. The call to be disciples of Christ is not a call that differentiates between women and men. It is a call to all persons irrespective of sex, race, social standing or intellectual abilities. Nor is faith in Christ determined by any of these categories. As long as the church or any communities of faith continue to use gender to determine the roles played by women and men, they will be in opposition to the call to discipleship that is extended by Christ to all people.

For practical work on this study see Module IV Activity 3 in the Manual.

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Handout V-4

The many faces of power: The book of Esther

Text

Esther 1.1 – 10.3

Background to the book of Esther

The story of Esther is set in the Persian capital of Susa about 486-465 BCE during the reign of King Ahaserus. The Jews were a captive minority within the kingdom. The book is accepted as a work of fiction written by an unknown Jew since many parts of the story do not represent historical facts. It is much like a popular romantic novel with a beautiful orphan girl as its heroine who rises from obscurity to power. The inclusion of Esther in the Bible has been questioned since it does not contain the religious themes that run through the other books in the Hebrew Scriptures. In many ways it is a very secular book. God is a silent presence throughout the story. No Jewish rituals or practices are included. The celebration of the Festival of Purim at the close of the story is the main reason for the inclusion of the book in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Among the themes that run through the book are the themes of honour and shame, pride and humility, the use, misuse and abuse of power, and the use of power by the powerless. The power of God is always a sensed reality that surrounds the characters and the events in the story.

The role of women in the book of Esther

Queen Vashti: Chapter 1 introduces the reader to King Ahaserus' first wife, Queen Vashti. Her refusal to obey the king's command to appear

naked to show off her beauty before a wild drinking party leads to her banishment and dethronement. By her refusal to obey the king she becomes a role model for women who would challenge the *status quo* within society. Her refusal to flaunt her physical beauty and her sexuality to enhance the image of her husband raises a gender issue before a strongly patriarchal society. Her refusal to be the obedient wife when society demanded that wives be the property of their husbands is an inspiration to women who struggle to establish their integrity and identity within the marriage relationship. The dismissal of Vashti and her replacement by Esther indicates the importance paid to the position of queen, rather than to the person who is queen. It demonstrates how structures stay intact, even at the cost of marginalizing people. Vashti retains her integrity and honour at the cost of her position as Queen of Persia.

Vashti was also necessary to the coming of Esther. Her actions paved the way for Esther to become the next queen. This is an example of how women often ride on the shoulders of other women to establish themselves.

Esther: Esther's story is a story of "rags to riches". As a Jewish orphan she is adopted by her uncle Mordecai. Because she is young and beautiful she is gathered together with other young women and taken to King Ahaserus'

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court to take part in a beauty pageant. The parade of young women was to help the king chose his new queen. Once Esther won the approval of the king she was established as queen. Her uncle Mordecai, too, gained status and recognition. He, however, persuades Esther to keep her Jewish identity a secret from her Persian husband. Esther obeys him and begins a journey to power and influence as a woman living within a patriarchal system.

Esther embodies all the stereotypes of a traditional wife as she begins her life in the royal court. She has no hesitation in using her beauty and her position to enable her people to survive. She uses her role as queen to exert influence and power over the men who surround her. She finds ways to be accepted while she works from within the patriarchal structures to protect the minority Jewish community which is under threat. She is the example of the wife who plays by the rules and who brings about change without openly challenging the *status quo*. She develops her power within the traditional home-based sphere and not within the political sphere. Yet she finds the right paths to retain her identity and to resist cooption into the political role that would give her the right to exercise dominant power.

Zeresh: She is the wife of Haman, the prime minister. She uses her influence to encourage him to carry out an act of vengeance against the Jews. She uses her role as wife in direct contrast to the way in which Esther uses her role as wife of the king. Zeresh uses her influence to destroy. Esther uses her influence to save.

The role of men in the book of Esther

King Ahaserus: The writer of the book names Ahaserus as king, from India to Ethiopia. His court is in Susa, which is one of the four capitals of the Persian empire. Historically, however, no king was known by this name in the Persian empire.

King Ahaserus appears throughout the story as a weak, easily manipulated man who can be influenced by the courtiers and leaders with whom he surrounds himself. He is indulgent and extravagant in his lifestyle. He believes that it is his right to own his people. He believes it is his right to own women and that this includes the queen and the women in his harem. He exemplifies the destruction that can come in a country or to individuals when the person in power allows himself to be used in the power games of others.

Mordecai: As the story commences, Mordecai is portrayed as a kind and caring man who accepts his orphan niece and brings her up as his daughter. As the story develops he uses information he discovers by chance to gain more power for Esther. He is shown as an unselfish person who does not use his knowledge to better his position. However, his actions gain him more favour with the King. Later on in the story, Mordecai uses his position to save the Jewish community living in the Persian empire. He develops from being a caring man to a ruthless official who uses power and position to destroy those who had once been his rulers.

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Haman: He is the prime minister in King Ahaserus' court and is the villain in the story. He is angered by Mordecai's position of favour and his refusal to bow to the prime minister. Haman plots to kill Mordecai, but the plan backfires and Haman is executed on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai's execution. The misuse and abuse of power as "power over" people and races is obvious in Haman's role in the story. The inciting of racial and ethnic hatred is also seen in his actions.

Hegai and the eunuchs: Three eunuchs are mentioned by name in the story. Hegai was the eunuch responsible for grooming Esther before she was presented at court. He shows a caring and protective attitude towards her.

Bigthan and Teresh, the two other eunuchs, are portrayed as scheming and untrustworthy guards of the harem. They plot to assassinate the king but are exposed by Mordecai who has overheard their plotting. They are both executed at the decree of the king.

Images of power in the book of Esther

The use, misuse and abuse of power are strong images throughout the book. Power as authority surfaces in the actions of the king and Haman. Power as influence is a strong image in the actions of Esther. The power of the powerless emerges in the actions of Esther and later in the manner in which the Jews, who had been a powerless ethnic minority in Persia, rose to appropriate power to move from powerlessness to the abusive use of power.

The following images of power form a framework for the study of the book of Esther:

Power as abuse within a structure or system, or by individuals

- The king and his court use their power and authority to inflict decisions on their people who are powerless to resist or challenge.
- Sexual exploitation as power is visible when the king behaves as the owner of women within the court as well as across the empire.
- Haman uses his position as prime minister and the authority of his office to demand the allegiance of Mordecai. He continues to use his power to order the execution of Mordecai. At no point in the story does he consult with the king, who is his ruler, or inform him of his plans. He uses the king's weak nature as a stepping stone to his own rise in power.
- Mordecai, who used his power to win justice for his people, ultimately becomes a victim of the misuse of power and authority. He becomes an example to the Jews of the use of power while remaining within a system. From the massacres carried out in Gentile provinces, to the hanging of Haman's sons, Mordecai replaces influence with power as vengeance.

Power as discrimination or hatred

- One person's actions or attitudes can be used as the standard for generalizing attitudes within a community. Haman uses Mordecai's refusal to bow to him to imply that his disobedience was an indication of the disobedience of the entire Jewish community. As a

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result of this attitude, racial hatred leading to the attempted eradication of Jews from the empire, was instigated by Haman. Any process for establishing peace becomes almost impossible when suspicion and hatred are used as power to control and destroy.

Power as identity and assimilation

- The beauty pageants were used as vehicles for exercising power. Esther accepts the events that surround the pageant and the banquets.
- She accepts the *status quo* and comes across as the stereotype for women who permit men to determine the boundaries of their lives.
- She neither protests nor shows enjoyment.
- Her outward appearance tells us nothing about her feelings.
- She accepts her uncle's instructions to keep her ethnic identity a secret from her husband.
- She appears as a woman being controlled by three men: her husband, her uncle and the eunuch.
- She accepts her identity through her relationship with her uncle and later as the wife of a Gentile, which was unacceptable in Jewish society.
- By keeping her Jewish identity a secret, she permits herself to be assimilated into a Gentile community.

Power as knowledge

- Mordecai uses knowledge as power when he wins more status for Esther and himself. He uses the information he received by chance to save a life. The writer does not say explicitly that Mordecai asked Esther to make certain that the king was aware of his role in saving the king's life. However, Esther continues to play the role of a dutiful niece and makes sure her uncle is given credit for his revelation of the plot.
- Both Esther and Mordecai appear to be good people, doing what is right with no thought of reward.
- Power used unselfishly can bring positive results.
- Knowledge as power can sometimes open doors that confrontation cannot.
- Haman demonstrates how knowledge can also be used as abusive power when he acts without consulting the king.

Power in taking a stand

- The stand taken by Queen Vashti against the exploitation of her sexuality is a strong example of the consequences of taking a stand against systems and structures that work against women.
- She gave up her power as queen, but left with her integrity intact.
- Esther's first response to the call to save her community was a clear "No!" – a human response when called to risk taking a stand.
- However, the words of Mordecai and Esther "for such a time as this" place before us the power of challenge and risk.

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- Mordecai was certain that if he took action against Haman's desire to destroy the Jews, God would protect his community, whether it be through Esther or some other source.
- Taking a stand gave him no options.
- Later, Esther comes to the same conclusion, "If I perish, I perish". The risk in taking a stand can sometimes be very costly.

Power in powerlessness

- Esther as an orphan, a woman, and a Jew could have claimed to be powerless and then become a victim herself of the destruction that was being planned for her community.
- She could have chosen to stay silent rather than risk her position as queen.
- But she did not.
- Unlike Queen Vashti who used direct confrontation, Esther uses the world of food and drink to achieve her ends. She organizes two banquets.
- By staying within familiar territory – the home – she uses her power and influence in ways that were familiar to her.
- After Haman's death Esther throws herself in tears at the feet of the king to plead for her people. Her posture in this scene is one of total powerlessness.
- Esther achieves her goal when the king, under the influence of Mordecai, decrees that all Jews living in Persia have the right to defend themselves and to destroy any armies or persons who pose a threat to them.

- Esther's actions reflect the choice that many oppressed people have to make: to accept the abuse of power or to use powerlessness as the road to survival.

Power in silence

- Esther uses silence as power when she does not intervene to prevent Haman's death. She is clear-thinking and courageous as she pleads for the safety of her people.
- However, she stays silent at a moment when most women would have been expected to act. Why, as a woman, did she not act to reduce the death sentence passed on Haman? Why did she not use her womanly graces to save a life? Why did she not behave as women are often expected to behave – and save a man?
- Esther stays silent and stands her ground.
- In silence she accepts the knowledge that she had saved her people.
- Perhaps she felt that God was expecting her to be silent at this point in the story.
- Silence as a positive use of power can prove to be a powerful weapon, especially for women when confronted by gender-based expectations in behaviour.
- Silence ceases to be power if it is read as an invitation for oppression or abuse.
- Although God is neither heard nor seen by way of direct intervention, the writer of Esther creates one scene that indicates the presence of God in the story – the restless night spent by the king when he realizes that he has not

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honoured Mordicai, the man responsible for saving his life. In a complete reversal Mordecai becomes a man of power when he is honoured by the king.

- God's silence as God's presence is recognizable at such times. Mordecai's belief that God would act to save his people was based on centuries of Jewish history.
- The triumph of good over evil at the close of the story is another indicator of the presence of a silent God.

A role model for leadership

Esther began as a powerless woman who learned to use her gender and her role as a wife to the king, to establish her vision for her people. She responded to the urgency of the needs of her community and accepted her role as the person through whom her people would be kept safe.

Her interaction with the men in the story (Ahaserus, Mordecai and Haman) reveal her sense of security in her identity as a woman,

despite her acceptance of the role of a traditional wife. Her determination neither to cross this boundary, nor to challenge the system, but to use her influence and skills from within her traditional role has similarities to the manner in which many church women exercise leadership. However, issues of gender and the use of women to achieve political solutions is not resolved through the actions of Esther. The safety of the community comes before Esther's subordination to the men in her life.

Esther began her role as a woman without power. She grew to accept power, but set her own boundaries in the exercise of that power. She seeks no honour for herself, but subsumes herself for the honour of her people. In many ways she depicts women as strong leaders who can learn to exercise power as influence, making no claims for themselves.

For practical work on this study see Module V Activity 5 in the Manual.

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Handout VI-1

Healing divisions: The writings of Paul

Texts

1 Corinthians 11.2-16

1 Corinthians 14.33b-36

Colossians 3.18-4.1

Ephesians 5.21-33; 1

Timothy 2.8-15

Why are ancient letters difficult to interpret today?

Interpreting letters written in a different era poses many challenges to the modern reader. Letters do not always contain a strong story line. Therefore there is very little indication of the community that influenced the writer's thoughts and insights. There is also very little detail about the community or the person/s who were the recipients of the letter. It is through the reading of any references to incidents mentioned in the letters that today's reader can glimpse something of the background of the persons and communities concerned as well as the issues being addressed.

Letters contain unspoken assumptions that both writer and receiver understand. Therefore not every detail is explained at length. Letters have the advantage of documenting important teachings and advice for transmitting to others. They also can record historical events. They formed the basis for introducing converts and non-churched people to the beliefs of Paul and his companions. However the clarification of any unclear material in a letter can be a long process. It would involve the process of writing replies

and receiving answers. This could be a tedious process. But it could document clarification so misinterpretation was not communicated.

One of the drawbacks faced by today's readers of the letters in the New Testament is the inability to do one's own clarification. Therefore we need to explore the possibility of all the letters being complete in themselves or of being compilations of different letters. Neither are we able to reconstruct accurately situations, events, issues or needs that prompted the writing of letters to various churches by the different Apostles. This is doubly difficult if the original manuscripts have been lost.

Current archaeology and the use of modern technology in the researching of ancient times has contributed to a better understanding of the people and the culture of the ancient world. Some of these findings can assist in interpreting and understanding documents such as Paul's letters to the early churches. One of the important challenges before today's reader of Paul's letters is to recognize them as letters, and not as legal documents. They were letters written by people to other people and were possibly not meant to be taken in a binding and legalistic sense. Such assumptions could colour interpretation and understanding. It could also be an injustice to the original intentions of the writer and give more authority to the interpretation than to the intention. Using ancient letters as one of the sources for transmitting our faith

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to the next generation challenges us to examine carefully how we interpret Christian teachings and how we communicate them to others.

Background

The New Testament holds a collection of twenty-one letters placed between the Acts of the Apostles and Revelation. The thirteen letters from Romans to Philemon are accepted by scholars to be the writings of Paul. The letters from Hebrews to Jude are now accepted as non-Pauline writings. The letters of Paul are named after the communities to whom he wrote, eg, Romans, Ephesians, Corinthians. The non-Pauline letters are named after the persons who wrote them, eg, Titus and Jude.

All twenty-one letters have a common focus. They dealt with spiritual, pastoral and practical issues as well as controversies within the different communities. These issues were addressed through theological and moral teachings. They recognized the presence of hostility in the different communities and the divisions that were growing in the new churches. The basis of the letters is the reenforcing and affirming of discipleship in Jesus Christ and the recognition of God's presence within the life of each Christian community.

Why were the roles of women and men so important to Paul?

The writings of Paul reveal how important a sense of order was to him. Paul sees the need for order in:

- Affirming divine order as God, Jesus Christ and Spirit.
- The order of creation as seen in the creation narratives in Genesis.
- Congregational order as it is contained in the Greco-Roman household code that had become a part of the Christian community.

Paul's teachings on the role of women and men, their behaviour in worship and the relationship between them in marriage, which are scattered throughout his writings, reflect the importance of order to him. These texts can be placed under two categories for the purpose of reflection:

- the behaviour of women and men within the existing household code: Colossians and Ephesians;
- the behaviour of women and men in worship: 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy.

What is the household code?

Households were seen as representing the wider social order by the philosophers from as far back as the 4th century BCE. Philosophers such as Aristotle maintained the need for the household to be in order, for society to be in order. By the 1st century CE Greco-Roman and Jewish societies had adopted the views of these philosophers as a household code on which society

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should be based. The male head of the household held three roles: husband, father, master. Each role had specific responsibilities. Women, children and slaves who made up the household had their own responsibilities. However, all of them accepted and related to the male head of the household who had absolute power and authority. The understanding was that if each household followed the code and its hierarchical structure, then society, based on the same pyramid, would also function well.

Christian household codes: Many Christians in first and second century churches seemed to break free from this patriarchal code because of the new sense of freedom they had gained at conversion. Many women are referred to as leaders in the house churches. Paul and other leaders often accepted the code by attempting to interpret it from a Christian perspective. However such an interpretation did not replace the hierarchy endorsed in the code.

Christian communities were expanding rapidly with Gentile converts. Households were being converted to Christianity. Often, women and slaves were the first to be converted. If the male heads of such households did not convert as well, these households were seen as suspicious or subversive, especially by those in positions of authority. Christians were gaining a new

understanding of their identity as persons of value and not as subordinates or slaves. These new concepts of freedom went against the accepted household code. The code was also a reflection of the economic, social and political order. Therefore the freedom experienced within the churches was interpreted as a threat to all society. Paul, while not wanting to reject the code, uses it by reinterpreting it from a Christian, theological perspective, in the hope of averting any threatening reactions from those who were non-Christians. When the above two passages are understood from this perspective, the patriarchal pyramid is replaced by God, as head; Jesus next; the church as God's "body". In the interpretation, God is referred to as a male, because the head of the household in the code has to be a man. It is this understanding that has caused some problems for the church of today, when women no longer see any validity for patriarchal structures to be the base for the functioning of the church. Paul's original intention, which was to protect the early churches from outside hostilities and heal the divisions caused by women taking on leadership roles, is lost when the Greco-Roman code is still the model for many churches today. In such an interpretation, Paul's use of the code to illustrate the church's relationship with Christ and through Christ with God, is moved from its primary position to a secondary position.

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So what do these texts really say?

Colossians: Paul's letter to the church at Colossae was written in 58 CE. The main purpose of the letter was to deal with the rise of rival teachers in the community who maintained that Colossians needed to perform certain rituals in order to be saved.

Ephesians: This letter was possibly written about 58 CE. Scholars differ in opinion as to whether this is a "genuine" Pauline letter since it lacks significant characteristics of Paul's earlier letters, such as references to persons known to Paul in the church at Ephesus. There is also a school of thought which says that Ephesians could have been a general letter addressed to all churches and focusing on God's plan for salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. The most dominant theme in the letter is the risen Christ whose body is the church in the world.

In Colossians 3.18-4.11 Paul uses the existing structure of the marriage relationship that is reflected in the household code and places it within a christological viewpoint where:

- Wives are asked to be subject to their husbands, voluntarily, and not according to the law. It is their relationship with Christ that should determine the boundaries of their relationship with their husbands.
- Husbands, in not treating their wives harshly, but in loving them, should also reflect their relationship with Christ.
- These instructions are for wives and husbands only. They are not for determining male/female relations outside of marriage, such as in the workforce and the church.

- The relationship between fathers and children and masters and slaves also takes on a new perspective.
- All these verses should be read within the context of the section that comes before them: Colossians 3.1-17. Here Paul spells out clearly the characteristics of all those who have become "God's chosen ones" (v.12).
- Verses 12-17 affirm a relationship of respect and mutual caring and loving that then places the words "subject to" in a different light.

Ephesians 5.21-23 should be viewed within the context of Ephesians 6.10-20. The household code is used here as a metaphor that reflects Christ as the head of the household, which is the church.

- Such an understanding does not mean that the heads of all households should be male.
- The authority of Christ, as the head of the church, is the model or centrepiece for all relationships within the family as well as within the church.
- This understanding of authority then makes authority as abusive power totally unacceptable in the home or in the community.
- Being obedient to Christ in everything is key to the understanding of authority when considering relations in the home and in society.
- Verses 24-26 should not be understood as a literal request for the cleansing of wives, or that wives can be cleansed only through the action of their husbands. The word is used as a metaphor to reflect God's holiness coming to each person because they are members of the body of Christ, which is the church. It is

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God's holiness received through God's spirit that cleanses women and men.

- Paul's use of the metaphor of Christ and the church as "head" and "body" adds a different understanding to relationships within a marriage and in the community. To accept or endorse violence in any form is to reject these teachings of Paul.

Corinthians: Paul's letter to the church which he had established in Corinth was probably written about 51 CE. There seems to be a strong possibility that what we know as 1 Corinthians is a second letter that replaced the original letter that was lost (1 Corinthians 5.9-12). The letter dealt with a number of crucial problems in the church, including the issues of immorality and the place of women in the church.

1 Timothy: is a letter that Paul probably wrote to Timothy about 62 CE. Together with 2 Timothy and Titus, this letter deals with characteristics of Christian leaders and the organization and structure of churches during this period.

1 Corinthians 11.2-16:

- Paul's primary focus in these verses is to respond to worship practices in the Corinthian community where women were prophesying and praying in the church.
- It is probable that women were assuming leadership positions and defying the household code and cultural expectations of women.
- The covering of heads when in worship seems to be one breach of cultural expectations. The

text does not indicate if all women in the church uncovered their heads when speaking or praying or whether the actions of a few women led to a generalization for all women.

- Paul's response to this action was to use his understanding of the creation of woman in Genesis to justify his position on the status of women as being subordinate.
- However, this attitude of Paul's contrasts strongly with his affirmation of women leaders such as Lydia and Priscilla.

1 Corinthians 14.33b-36:

- There are scholars who point to many differences in these verses that make them seem to be additions to the original letter at a later date. The editor was perhaps trying to bring women into line with behaviour that was acceptable in Greco-Roman society.
- The evidence for such an assumption is that nowhere else does Paul say that women should not pray or prophesy in church. He calls on women to cover their heads in worship, but does not ask them to keep silent.
- If we accept these verses as an injunction from Paul that women should keep silent, how then do we deal with Paul's acceptance of women as leaders in Corinth and in all other churches in Philippi and Rome?

1 Timothy 2.8-15:

- Only one verse is addressed to men in chapter 2 which deals with instructions concerning prayer and behaviour in worship.
- Seven verses address the behaviour of women in worship.

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- Once again Paul is relying on the household code to determine the role of women. Since most meetings of Christian congregations were held in homes, such gatherings too were referred to as “churches”. The visibility of women in leadership in these house churches, as is evidenced in other Pauline letters and in Acts, could have led to more hostility towards these congregations.
- The dress code for women in the household code was clear. Paul’s reference to women’s attire may have been based on this.
- His reference to hairstyles could have been based on the negative image given to women who were caught up in ecstatic utterances when they worshipped Greek gods and goddesses, with hair hanging loose. In Greco-Roman society women were expected to wear their hair in more elaborately arranged styles. A rejection of this expectation could have led to more hostility being generated against these communities.
- Because the safety and integrity of the young churches was of primary importance to Paul, he seems to have no hesitation in contradicting himself, and in ignoring the leadership role played by women as his coworkers.
- However, Paul’s personal views emerge when he is addressing issues in congregations that relate to women’s sexuality.

Why are these Pauline texts still used against women today?

Statistically less than 10% of all Paul’s letters refer to women and a code of behaviour for them. The balance 90% of his letters deal with other issues in the Christian communities that were growing during his time. Yet, the focus on Paul’s teachings on women seems to be out of proportion to all his other teachings. Despite the centuries that divide us from the time of Paul, women still seem to be captive within the Greco-Roman household codes. The hierarchy of power and status that was based on this code seems to exist today, even though there are no longer slaves, there is very little hostility towards Christian churches and the church has matured and grown into a stable organization.

The status of women has also changed in the majority of societies around the world. Globalization has established a society based on economics and technology. Women now have the ability to occupy positions of power and authority in the workforce, in the political world, in scientific and technological development and as the main wage-earners in families. Yet in many churches women are still trapped within ancient household patterns that expect them to be subordinate and obedient. The injunction to be silent seems to have been lost somewhere along the way!

The meaning of words and the use of language have also changed. Linguists continue to demonstrate the manner in which language and meaning are influenced by the culture in which they grow.

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Therefore words such as “submission”, “subordinate”, “obedient” need to be examined and understood in the society in which we live. Does the patriarchal understanding of the word “submissive” apply to the way a woman needs to relate to male colleagues who may be in a lower position in a work place? How does a woman principal interpret “obedience” when relating to male teachers on her staff?

In confining women to roles based on ancient social systems, the church also gives these teachings of Paul a legitimacy that is almost legalistic, rather than addressing them as letters. By interpreting them as binding for all women for all

time, we may be guilty of endorsing violence against women and the confining of women and children to abusive situations. In doing so we tend to forget that Paul placed all his teachings within God’s relationship with women and men as individuals who responded directly to God. Perhaps we forget that one of God’s fundamental gifts to humanity is the placing of women and men within community, where right relations, mutual caring, respect and the unity of the community are the ideals to which Christians are called to aspire and to follow.

For practical work on this study see Module VI Activity 1A in the Manual.

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Handout VI-2

Women as church leaders

The story: The pastor of a church is struggling with a problem. He needs to select someone to work with him as a lay leader. The last lay leader was a well-known business man in the church community. However, he had not been able to give much time to the work of a lay leader, and the pastor had to do most of the work.

His first choice was an active woman member of his church. She had all the skills needed to be a good co-worker with him. She was also well liked by most of the community, though some women seemed to have problems with her. She was not married, so this meant she had more time for church work.

“But,” thought the pastor, “can I appoint her? How will the men feel? Would people misunderstand because I am a married man and she is single? How would my wife react? And how would other women react? She is my first choice, though.

“Of course there is also the matter of behaviour. How would she handle the authority that comes with such a position in the church? Would she try to take over my authority with people? Would she try to undermine me with the bishop? She is very popular now. But once she becomes my lay leader will she change? It will be hard for me to get rid of her if things go wrong – especially since she is a woman.

“Why can I not find a man with her talents? It would be easy for me to chose then!”

For practical work on this text see Module VI Activity 1B in the Manual.

Module

Handout VII-1

God's new community: Acts of the Apostles and Galatians

Texts

Acts 2.1-21

Galatians 3.23-29

Background

Acts: The book of the Acts of the Apostles was possibly written about 70 CE and contains the story of the beginnings of the church in Jerusalem and its spread throughout the Roman empire. It carries details of the work of the apostles, especially the work of Peter and Paul, after the resurrection of Jesus. Included in the story of the church's beginnings are sections dealing with the need for strengthening the developing Christian communities, the Law of Moses and its implication for Gentile converts, the evangelistic mission that is entrusted to all converts, and other theological crises that were a part of the new faith communities.

Galatians: This is a pastoral letter written by Paul about 50 CE to the church in Galatia. The letter deals with a number of theological issues, some of which indicate that it is a church in crisis. The letter contains references to persons well known to Paul but there is very little known about them.

After converting Gentiles, baptizing them, setting up the church and teaching them, Paul leaves with the confidence that they are doing well. However he hears later that the church is being destabilized through the preaching of a

“different gospel” (v.1.6) by Jewish Christian missionaries. These missionaries were trying to persuade the Gentile Christians to be circumcised, to observe the Jewish Sabbath and feast days, and to obey everything written in the Law of Moses. The dispute in Galatia was between two groups of Christians: Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles.

Who belongs in the new community?

The description contained in Acts 2.1-18 of the coming of God's spirit to mark the beginning of a new community, portrays a gathering of the full community of faith in Jerusalem. Therefore it is possible to believe that women and children, as well as masters and slaves were present at this gathering which was referred to as Pentecost. What does Pentecost teach us?

- God's Spirit was poured out on all those present. Neither sex nor status nor race nor ethnicity figured in the choice of those who received the spirit.
- All were present. All received equally.
- Although God's spirit was received by each person, it also bound them into one community without any evidence of divisions or separation. They were the **people** of God, not men of God or women of God.
- The use of the prophet Joel's words in vv.17-18 to validate the pouring out of God's spirit on all those gathered also spells out the mission of the new community.
- The prophecy includes an intergenerational challenge to the community.

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- Women and men are recognized as active participants in the new community.
- There are no gender-based instructions or expectations in these passages.

Is Galatians 3.23-29 a Magna Carta for equal rights?

This section should be studied together with the whole of chapter 3, so that it can be seen in perspective. The themes in the letter that surround these verses indicate that:

- We are God's children not because we have faithfully obeyed the law, but because of God's actions through Jesus Christ.
- Jesus' death and resurrection had brought in a new "creation" and released humanity from its bondage to sin.
- God's spirit was now available to all – Jews and Gentiles alike – with no differentiation between people on any grounds;
- God's spirit now released people to be free, if they believed in God, through Christ.

The chapter also focuses on our identity as Christians. Our identity is based on the following:

- Our union with Christ comes at our baptism and not through the observing of rituals.
- Our trust, like Abraham's, is in God, not in religious laws and practices.
- Our freedom from sin is because of our faith in Christ.
- Our new inheritance as God's children comes through the acceptance of God's spirit.

- It is our being Christ's disciples that helps us to discern the difference between legal religiosity and responding to Christ's call.
- All forms of division are transformed by Christ in the new community.

Verses 28-29 spell out the differences that will exist in the new community. However, divisions caused by differences will disappear. Divisions created by social, economic, racial or ethnic differences will have no place in the new community that is born through our baptism and faith.

Verse 28 does not denote a loss of identity for women and men. It acknowledges identity which includes sexual orientation as a part of identity, and rejects any form of separation.

These verses are not about equal rights, but about right relations between people who are in a right relationship with God. We are equal before God. This is the basis for the understanding and experiencing of equality between women and men. For Paul, the community and the manner in which its people related to each other were the characteristics that pointed to God as head and centre of the Christian community.

How would we recognize God's new community today?

A Christian community or church that is working towards achieving a model for transforming structures and attitudes that often keep them tied to outdated traditions and practices would be based on:



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- affirming women and men as persons of equal value;
- recognizing the strengths, skills and gifts of people without a gender bias;
- exercising power with each other;
- recognizing power-within as God's presence, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, age or sexual orientation;
- developing styles of leadership that would care for the whole community and not be limited by divisions created by difference or identity;
- recognizing and acknowledging God as the centre of the new community, working with the whole community – not only with leaders – in recreating God's vision for a integrated and transformed creation.

For practical work on this study see Module VII Activity 1 in the Manual.

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Handout VII-2

Litany beyond gender¹¹

For every woman who is tired of being a weak person when she knows she is strong,
there is a man tired of looking strong when he feels vulnerable.

For every woman tired of looking foolish,
there is a man tired of people expecting him to know everything.

For every woman tired of being called an emotional female,
there is a man tired of the denial of the right to cry and be tender.

For every woman tired of being used as a sexual object,
there is a man tired of being concerned about his virility.

For every woman tired of being called not feminine because she is competitive,
there is a man tired of competing as the only way to prove his masculinity.

For every woman tired of being tied to her children,
there is a man tired of being denied the responsibility of paternity.

For every woman tired of being denied a satisfactory job or fairer salary,
there is a man tired of being responsible for the economic situation of another human being.

When at last we all stop posturing and feeling threatened and diminished
and turn our energies to struggle to find each other,
when we actually listen and understand, approve and affirm,
then we shall know what has been so from the beginning.
God made us for each other and for God.

For practical work on this study see Module VII Activity 1B in the Manual.

¹¹ The litany is from "Echoes of our Journey" as quoted in WARC Report on Gender Awareness and Leadership Development for the Pacific, Brisbane, Australia, 19-27 November 2000.

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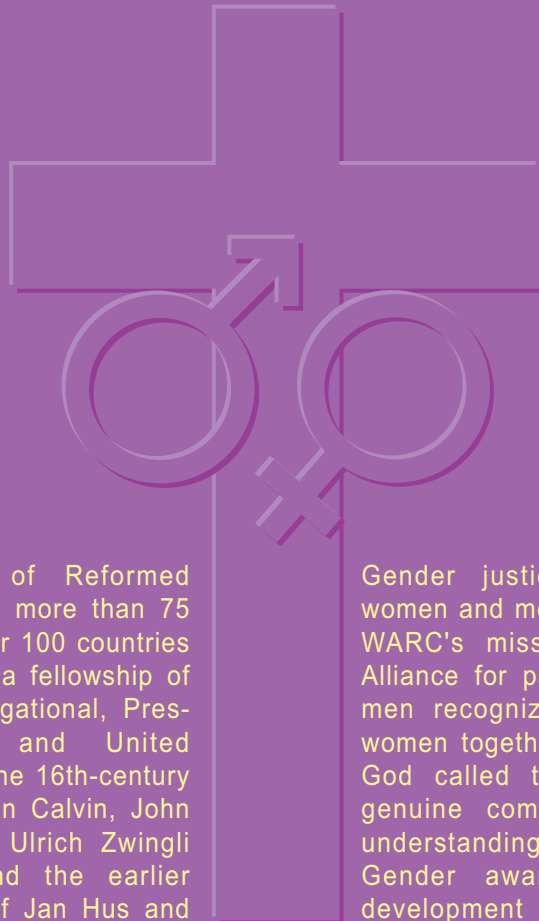
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Created in God's Image

From Hierarchy to Partnership



The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) links more than 75 million Christians in over 100 countries around the world. It is a fellowship of more than 200 Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed and United churches with roots in the 16th-century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox, Marie Dentière, Ulrich Zwingli and many others, and the earlier reforming movements of Jan Hus and Peter Valdes. WARC is an interdependent network of people and churches living, working and worshipping together with faith in God's promise always to be with God's creation. The gifts and talents of many peoples and cultures make the Alliance a dynamic international community.

Gender justice and partnership of women and men is an important area of WARC's mission. The vision of the Alliance for partnership of women and men recognizes the full humanity of women together with men as people of God called to work for dignity and genuine community based on love, understanding and right relationships. Gender awareness and leadership development is important in building partnership of women and men and imagining a new model of church which offers hope for life in fullness for all people regardless of gender, age, race, class, tribe or sexual orientation.



World Alliance of Reformed Churches
Geneva, Switzerland