

Conference for International Black Lutherans  
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Justification: Justice and Gender  
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In three consecutive meetings, the Conference for International Black Lutherans has decided to fundamentally deal with theological issues from the point of view of the Black Lutherans in the world. This is particularly in dealing with theological articulation and praxis from the Black experience. In other words, the main focus/ task of this conference for the two prior conferences has been to wrestle with the Lutheran heritage as lived and experienced by the Black Lutherans in the African Continent and those in Diaspora. As the journey that began in 1986 continues, Black Lutherans are struggling to find their place and identity within the age-long Lutheran traditions that have been considered as standard teachings of all Lutherans in the world, regardless of their varied contextual locations and experiences.

One of the key issues or doctrinal statements that is so fundamental for Lutherans and one which the Black Lutherans have decided to wrestle with is the doctrine of the Justification by faith. For the past two meetings (1986 and 1996 both took place in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe) Black Lutherans have decided to discuss and deliberate on this doctrine from different angles. Discussions centered on the themes like “Justification by Faith and its Social-economic Implications, Justification by Faith and its Continuing Relevance for South Africa, etc.

For this third conference with its emphasis on the Confession for the New Millennium, the theme of Justification seems to be of continuing relevance for this

conference, with the discussion taking on pertinent issues of justice in regard to gender and race issues. In this paper, the focus is on the issue of Justification: Justice and Gender Issues. As one reads this document, he/she must be aware of the paradigmatic shifts that I have decided to work with in an attempt to deal with this topic. These include three major areas: First, the hermeneutical approach on the perception of the theme of justification. Secondly, there is a deliberate and purposeful shift in the manner of discussion, the emphasis being more on the practical side of the issue. Thirdly and lastly, being a biblical theologian, the topic is dealt with more emphatically from a biblical point of view than doctrinal analysis.

Let me elaborate on the methodologies: In this paper, the emphasis on justification is in regard to the issues of justice and gender. While gender centers on the relationships of male and female in the society, the analysis is however, being done from the female/feminist point of view. Not only that female experience in general is used as hermeneutical principle, but female experience from the African cultural setting. Lutheranism is lived and experienced in varied cultures. But, the same cultural patterns experiences for male and female are varied and distinct.

This theme is therefore, approached through the African female experiences, assuming that these experiences are shared to some great extent with our Black sisters elsewhere. While our experiences as Black sisters are similar in many ways, they are however, significantly distinct. This is important to mention beforehand because these distinct experiences shape and inform the way we theologize and live out our faith in our varied cultural locations. It is experience that also shapes the ideas.

Feminist hermeneutics build both on experience and experiment. "Through these different forms of expression it seeks to accomplish both a negative and a positive task. Its negative task is the critique of and struggle against all form of oppression resulting from patriarchy, sexism, and androcentrism; its positive task is one of reform and reconstruction, of a reinterpretation of the Christian tradition, especially the Bible and the core symbols and teachings of Christianity in the light of women's experience, and with the critical attitude toward the socially and historically constructed notion of gender."<sup>1</sup> As biblical theologians, when we discuss justice, the Bible will be a leading source in an attempt to glean the meaning of justice as intended by God for all of God's children. This does not discard the use of doctrinal analysis of justification and justice. Martin Luther himself was led to his "faith discovery" by reading the Bible and he used the Bible to countercheck the official teachings of the church in his time. The Bible became to him a corrective tool as far as the teachings of the church were concerned.

While I, myself have very little interest and mastery of Systematic Theology, it is also my belief that it is a high time now, for the Lutherans to use the Bible to counter check what they confess and teach. Every confession has its own clue and foundation to the Bible. Justification is the heart of Lutheran confession, but it is also the central *concern of the Bible and the source of the Christian faith. Justification supplies a necessary principle for biblical interpretation, that it makes a lifestyle of highest excellence. The Bible thus, becomes a prerequisite for the examination of this theme in the light of the Bible's witness concerning God's dealing with humankind in relation to God, human place in creation and the course of history.*

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<sup>1</sup> Ursula King, Feminist Theology from the Third World, 4

Since this discussion is on justice and gender, the Bible's place cannot be taken for granted. The Bible provides insights into how the concept of gender (male) is embedded in traditional texts, interpretation of those texts, structures and symbols. The Bible has been used as a major instrument to legitimize the oppression of women, in creating gender imbalance, and in perpetuating sexism. But, the Bible has been a major force in empowering and liberating women from cultural, social and religious domination of men in Africa as it is elsewhere in this globe. Even today the Bible continues to play the above roles when it comes to the issues of gender.

Some of the central and practical concerns of this paper is to examine the Lutheran doctrine of Justification by faith as professed and practiced by Lutherans and how it has succeeded to uphold the central value of gender equality. The question that arises then, is, has Lutheran doctrine of justification not symbolically legitimized the oppression of women by men under the patriarchal system? Feminist contribution here will try to struggle with the above question but will also raise another constructive and challenging question such as: How can the Lutheran church that confesses justification by faith articulate new and different understanding of justification that is inclusive and wholistic?

Doing theology as a woman and using her experience as one of the hermeneutic principles underlie two major facts: Female experiences give insights to critically look into Lutheran traditions to see if the patriarchy there is inevitable and reformable. Secondly female analysis draws on African women's experience (general women experiences as well) and suggest how these experiences can be included in theological work today.

The discussion that follows will delineate on this topic in the following subheadings:

**Definition of Justification/justice from both biblical and dogmatic point of views.**

The word justification comes from the Latin word “*justus*”, which in its original meaning has legal connotations. This concept like its counterpart “righteousness/justification” is also relational in nature. These two facts are very significant in the understanding of the above theme: “Justification: Justice and Gender”. The Bible puts great value on the question of justice in the society, rendering that, which is just and right to the people.

I will here attempt to give a sweeping picture on how the Bible presents the definition of justification/justice. Justice and righteousness are designed by the two Hebrew words משפט וצדקה: Other similar words that are used alongside and in relation are צדק ומישור which means righteousness and equity (see Isa 11:4; 33:15; 45:19; Ps. 9:9; 58:2; 98:9, see also Prov. 1; 3; 2:9. In the Ugaritic literature and Phoenician righteousness is paired with uprightness, in Hebrew צדק ישר. In the other biblical material righteousness is paired with truth צדק/אמונה or אמת (see 1 Kgs 3:6; Isa. 11:5; 59:4; Ps. 85:12; 66:13; Zech.8: 8). This word pair is similar in meaning to the Akkadian word-pair *kittum u misarum*, which literally mean “truth and equity.”<sup>2</sup> Egyptian and Elam tie righteousness with protection.

When considering the meaning of משפט וצדפה, their Mesopotamian counterparts mentioned above are very important. In both the Israel context and that of their

neighbors, the two terms refer a character trait granted by God to the king (Ps. 72:1-2). God bestows justice and righteousness to the king. This is a sense of justice that the king uses as a criterion to judge justly or to be fair in administering justice to all of his subjects.

In the code of Hamurabi, the king (Hamurabi himself) claims that Shamash has given him truth (*kinatum*) and that *kittum u misarum* are Shamash's gifts. The Assyrian king Ahurbanipal writes in one of his letters that gods have granted him *kittu misaru*, 'truth and equity.'<sup>3</sup> These ancient Near East materials together with their Hebrew counterpart attribute justice and righteousness to a deity. They mark God's special character especially in relation to God's creation. "Justice and righteousness are considered a sublime, divine ideal in Ps. 33:5: God is said to love righteousness and justice."<sup>4</sup>

Justice also has a legal connotation as it relates to "judge" and "judgment". The word encompasses the variety of meaning as well such as: rights, vindication, norm, etc. It is synonymous with its counterpart *din*(Hebrew) and *dym*(Semitic), both of which have a meaning to "judge". Again, Israel regarded Yahweh as the judge of the whole earth. "God's universal judgeship was based on the fact that it was He who created the world and established equity and justice (Ps 99:1-4). He was thus regarded as the source and guardian of justice because justice and righteousness are his very nature and attributes (Ps 97:2)."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, "Justice and Righteousness" משפט וצדקה The Expression and Its meaning" in Justice and Meaning: Biblical Themes and their Influence ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 229.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol. 3, 1128

As guardian of justice, God intervenes on behalf of those who are oppressed by their enemies, or those who are unjustly treated. “Those who felt unjustly treated by others in social, economic, and political relationships summoned God to judge them, that is, to do them justice by saving them from their enemies or oppressors (Ps 7:6-11).”<sup>6</sup> Israel appealed to Yahweh’s retributive justice, where God judges by ordeal. Furthermore, Yahweh’s judgement is fair because it is issued from God who is righteous judge. The idea of liberation lies behind God’s intervention in overcoming Israel’s enemies. God’s deliverance of Israel from her oppressors’ is experienced as both gift and power to save.

The idea of justice extended to God’s people particularly those whom Yahweh has chosen to lead the people. God shows mercy and concern toward the poor; basically these consist of the orphans, widows and the oppressed. “Justice was central among the Israelites because they were very much concerned with social relationships among themselves as a people covenanted to God and also among the nations surrounding them.”<sup>7</sup> God’s concern for justice is more obvious in the post-exilic prophetic literature of the Old Testament. Prophets Isaiah, Micah and Amos were very instrumental in showing how people of Israel of their days have perverted justice.

*The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* summarizes concisely but accurately the meaning of justification: “The term as an expression for salvation through Christ, is rooted in the soteriological vocabulary of the OT, finds its canonical definition in Paul’s letters to the Galatians and Romans, and has moved to the centre of subsequent

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Christian thinking whenever the problem of a legalistic or moralistic piety has reappeared.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul did not differ with Judaism in the understanding of righteousness. For him, righteousness is a condition for salvation. It has both moral and legal connotations. Righteousness (*dikaiosune*), in Paul, “carried over the forensic connotation of the Hebrew *sedeq* or *sedaqah*: it refers not to the moral quality but to standing in the eyes of the judge or court. To be ‘justified’ is to have the verdict of ‘just’ or ‘righteous’ passed upon one (in Greek the three words are cognates from the same root *dik-*): that is, to be acquitted, vindicated, declared right or innocent.”<sup>9</sup> However, unlike Judaism, Paul speaks of the righteousness through faith in Christ (Rom. 9:30-31; 10:4-6; Phil. 3:9), apart from the law (Rom. 3:21). Justification is by grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24).

I have briefly indicated earlier that my knowledge and interest in the doctrinal theology is scant, however, suffice it to say, one cannot jump into discussions and override the whole doctrinal queries surrounding the issue of justification as embraced by Lutherans. Defining justification/justice itself will not be enough to open up the discussion on justice and gender in the light of the Lutheran confession of the justification by faith. Despite its historic importance in Christian dogmatic tradition, the word “justification” rarely appears in the Bible. Thus, for a fruitful study to take place, one needs to consider somehow elaborate discussions on the subject of justification, engaging mostly with doctrinal analysis. The impelling cause of justification in the Lutheran tradition is God alone. It is a gracious act unmerited by the believer. Faith becomes the means by which the grace of God in justification is received. The Dictionary

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<sup>8</sup> The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, 314

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

of Latin and Greek Theological Terms gives a systemic and analysis of justification as follows: “justification, a counting or reckoning righteous; specifically, that actuality, or act, of grace (actus gratiae) in which God forgives sinful individuals, counts them as righteous on the basis of their faith in Christ, and accepts them as his own reconciled children, apart from all human merit and solely because of the superabundant merit of Christ’s work of satisfaction.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite the theological jargon and endless discussions that go on the issue of justification, for the greater part, both the Roman Catholic and the Reformed agree in the forensic use of justification, whereby, a legal or judicial declaration is made upon a person. But the grounds for that justification differ radically between Roman Catholic and Reformed theology. For the Reformers, the declaration of justice follows the imputation of Christ’s righteousness on the regenerated sinner. Rome believes that justification follows and is based on sanctification. That means, a declaration of justice is made to a person who is just. This view is called the analytic view of justification. According to this view, God declares a person to be just when justice (or righteousness) inheres in the subject.<sup>11</sup> “The justified person could not have become righteous without the assistance of infused grace, but he is still deemed righteous only when he has become inherently righteous. Nothing is added by which the person is considered righteous. The just are declared just because analysis demonstrates that they are just.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the Reformation view of justification shows a stark difference with that of Rome. The latter’s view is synthetic. “God declares a person just based on something that is

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Muller, Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985) 162

<sup>11</sup> R. C. Sproul, Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995) 109

added, something that is not inherent in the person: the imputed righteousness of Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Justification in this sense is an act of grace of a just God who justifies those who believe.

There are still ongoing discussions and differences among the Protestants on the doctrine of justification. But that is not our major concern in this paper. I have objectively and deliberately pinpointed the major issues of justification and justice from both the Biblical and doctrinal points of view. The above discussion will foster us to re-think our practicality of our faith as outlined in the doctrinal confessions of the Church. Do these confessions stand linked to the biblical teachings, the teachings that had inspired Luther to reformulate the doctrines? If there are shifts that are made, what are they and how do they affect our understanding of doctrines like justification and its implication to the gender relationships?

Sproul asserts that the doctrine of justification has developed “a meaning quite independent of its biblical origins.”<sup>14</sup> In the Old Testament and in Pauline corpus, justification means God’s saving action toward God’s people. The doctrine of justification in brief words concerns the means by which a person’s relationship to God is established. Without biblical background, the doctrine of justification makes people at ease with their faith and unconcerned with issues of justice which are the core of the Old Testament message. It is my contention that the doctrine of justification to some extent has nothing to do with justice, at least in the practical aspect of life. If it does, why do some members in the Lutheran community justify themselves? The doctrines have to be closely linked with the Bible and particularly with the biblical concepts. There is need to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

a return to the Bible. Sproul is also convinced that the two must not be independent of each other. He comments: "The biblical doctrine of justification may be distinguished from biblical concept of justification but may not be separated from them."<sup>15</sup>

Is justification still a valid principle for the church? Are Lutherans united on the doctrine of justification? Is this kind of justification that Lutherans world wide uphold relevant to the realities that many people in the developing world encounter? Carl E. Braaten has made a brief summary on the conflicting views on justification. Lutherans like the Reformed are divided on this doctrinal quest of justification. Lutherans who live in the so called "Third world Countries", together with other Christians are finding theological articulation and principle that can relevantly speak to their varied oppressive systems. Economic, social, gender and racial oppressions compel theologians from these social locations to engage in the liberation theology instead of haranguing the people with the doctrine of justification that do not, in essence, project God's justice to people in a realistic manner. Theologians from the West such as Braaten are concerned that the doctrine of justification "seems to be eclipsed in most current academic trends in theology, including the various liberationist and feminist models of theology, as well as the theologies of process and the theologies of religious pluralism. The cumulative impact of these theologies has relegated theologies normed by the article of justification to a relatively marginal existence."(Braaten, 10)

What scholars from the West are missing is the fact that they do not ask themselves or engage themselves in finding out the doctrine of justification is loosing place of importance in these groups. They also fail to expose what is common among

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 99

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

these groups who have chosen to explain Christian message the way they do. Is there common denominator among the said groups, and what significant shift is made from justification to liberation theology, which is the emphasis of most these groups.

“Justification as a divine act *propter Christum* is an actual *prius* of all inward changes for the better in human being. Justification is a pardoning heart of God reaching out to meet sinners with free and undeserved grace.”<sup>16</sup> (Braaten pg. 24)

While there a lots of conflicting arguments on the justification, our objective is to look into the practical reality of this principle. What are the implications of being justified by faith by grace alone (*sola gratia*) with respect to the social issue of the society? To be more precise the pertinent central question is: Has the doctrine of justification helped in enhancing gender relationships in the community of believers? Luther himself regarded “the article of justification” as not merely a single article among many others, but as the foundational truth with generative power affecting the entire organism of Christian faith, life, and thought.”<sup>17</sup> If this is the case, and is, indeed what Luther believes to be the foundational truth, what impact does this truth have on the relationship of people to God and to one another? Isn’t it true, given the social realities of our time and context, that the community that claims to be justified very often falls into the danger of justifying itself? “Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone was and continues to be revolutionary. It constitutes a real threat to the institutional church,

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<sup>16</sup> Carl E. Braaten, Justification: The Article by which the Church Stands or Falls, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990) 24

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 28

because it pulls the rug from under those who would arrogate to themselves the power to decide the ultimate matters of life and death for others. God alone has that power.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Discussions on Gender Issues**

Our definition of the term has highlighted the central concern for justice as based on the ideas of rightness and wrongness in the society, particularly as people relate to each other. Justice has to do with the idea of equality and fairness as important aspects of justice as well as the whole question of liberation. Biblical concept of justice includes liberation from bondage, which includes male oppression as well. Fundamentally, Christianity preaches equality, or at least relative equality. Insofar as the female sex has been concerned, this concept has been ignored or corrupted. In the name of Christianity that bases on the Bible at times, women have downgraded, relegated to the marginal level in the society and in the church, women have been rendered subservient and passive in the many articulations, expressions and activities within God’s community. If African and African-American lived their religious experiences in the shadow of white cultural domination, African and African-American women face the dual cultural oppression. Women from these contexts experience living both in the white cultural domination as well as male domination of their own cultural settings.

One of the perturbing areas where the issue of justice in gender relationships is violated is in the violence that has permeated human society. African male-dominated culture and structural patterns of the society are conducive to violence against women in different spheres of life. “These structures are created in the image of man, shaped by male perceptions, organized on the basis of male priorities and needs, operated to

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<sup>18</sup> Simon Maimela, Theology and the Black Experience: The Lutheran Heritage Interpreted by African and African-American Theologians, ed. Albert Pero and Ambrose Moyo, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing

facilitate male work and leisure. Women are simply co-opted into these institutions and patterns of behaviour.”<sup>19</sup>

Violence and domination are interrelated and are synonyms. “In many cultures, including those that produced the Hebrew Bible, violence and domination are central to the discursive production of the gendered subject. Intensely debated claims about the ‘universality’ of female subordination in human cultures have been qualified by ethnographic accounts of societies where male dominance is not determinative. But across the cultural spectrum male domination remains almost ubiquitous, and despite the demonstrated variability in forms of masculinity, violence is most often construed as masculine attribute. In such cultural situations, gender becomes a crucial articulator of the experience of violence. Perception of rightness and wrongness of violence is shaped by normative gender discourses: violent acts bolster masculine identity while a woman’s role, in many cultures, is properly to endure (i.e. receive) violence.”<sup>20</sup>

In Africa men abuse women physically and emotionally. Like many women in the world, African women suffer battering from their husbands and their recourse is often not advocated by the same Church that proclaims justice and confesses justification. Cries and stories of women suffering violence from men’s dominion have never become a major concern of the church. Often when women are beaten they will run away and find refuge from relatives or friends. If they go to their pastor they are advised to persevere since endurance is one of the Christian virtues. If they choose to bring their case before the village elders, often women end up being told that they are somehow responsible for

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House, 1988) 37.

<sup>19</sup> Sister Bernard Mncube, “Sexism in the Church and in the African Context” in *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa* ed. Denise Ackermann et als. pg. 356

their fate. That if they had acted differently, there would have been no abuse. Acting differently many time refers to being more dependent and submissive. On discussing depression in abused women, M. Gay Hubbard contends: "Whatever the content of the specific criticism, however, the refrain was always the same: If only the woman had been different, the problem wouldn't have occurred, or the problem would have vanished like a puff of wind, and the woman wouldn't have been hurt."<sup>21</sup> Placing responsibility upon abused women is to pervert justice and deny human rights. It is another way to exercise control, dominion and power over women. God never intended relationships in gender to be a power play that was introduced into the world by sin.

Women and children suffer rape and sexual violence from day to day. Women who are sexually assaulted are denied of their justice, and these things happen in the community of the confessing Christians. Because the victims of sex are women and children and because their cases are never taken seriously, they often end up suffering in secret. They had to endure pain, anger and humiliation. Even when they man who assaulted a woman in known, many times a woman ends up being blamed for her sexuality, appearance, dressing or her behavior. "Many Jewish teachers in the time of Jesus blamed men's lust on the way women dressed or acted, but Jesus placed the blame for lust squarely on the man who did it (Matt. 5:28 ). Nowhere in the Bible is any guilt assigned to a rape victim, or does anyone question whether she might have done something to have invited it. Anyone who attributes to the rapist anything less than all the

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<sup>20</sup> Harold C. Washington, " 'Lest He Die in the Battle and Another Man Takes Her': Violence and Laws the Construction of Gender in the Laws of Deuteronomy 20-21", in Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East, ed. Victor Matthews, et. als., (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 193.

<sup>21</sup> Hubbard, "Depression in Abused Women," in Women Abuse and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck. (Grand Rapids Michigan, Baker Books, 1996), 143.

blame is making up his or her own ideas, not reflecting those of the Bible.”<sup>22</sup> In few cases that I have read and heard from our media, the assaulted are prosecuted for at least thirty years or so. But these reported cases are few and sometime even at the court of law justice is not done because men have money to bribe and silence the case. Rape is a traumatic experience, and it can sometimes happen without physical attack. Men who are in power, or teachers at schools often use sex to promise women to get jobs or good marks or some promotion.

The Old Testament condemns rape, and plainly demonstrates that God is on the side of the rape victims and that justice is being done to the assaults (cf. Ge. 34; 49:7; 34:30). Our churches have not played any advocacy role as to the silence of rape issues in the society. How can the Church that has experienced God’s grace of salvation remain on the comfortable sidelines of history while some members of the same community are crying the cries of injustice? When justification is tied with the biblical and Ancient Near East understanding, then we can grasp the full picture of the concept. Righteousness and justice have to do with rightness, liberation, truth, equity, and protection. These are not only the qualities and characteristics of God, but are characteristics that God bestows upon believers. They are not meant to be kept within ourselves or hidden; instead, they are to be flow in action as the fruits of that loving grace bestowed upon us. It is therefore time for the Church to take out her light under the bushel and put it on the high place so that it gives light to all. Before that is truly done, our claim as reformers will only remain empty words based on some written doctrinal treaties.

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<sup>22</sup> Craig S. Keener, “Some Biblical Reflections on Justice, Rape, and an Insensitive Society” in Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, (Grand Rapids: Baker Bokks, 1996) 128-129

Denial of justice is not only failure to do justice, or to pervert justice but also the silence against all forms of injustices in the society. Failure to advocate for women who suffer injustice and violence puts the Church in a very challenging state. How can a Lutheran Church that builds on Luther's revolutionary ideas on justification neglect and undermine issues of gender? How can she look upon these issues as peripheral, and how can Lutherans consistently continue to enjoy the male hierarchy and monopoly even in matters of faith and doctrines?

In some Lutheran churches in Africa there are still confessors of justification who justify ministry as a male domain. They use all kinds of justification from biblical, doctrinal, cultural, etc) to silence women gifts to the church. As a result, the church in Africa is a place where gender imbalance is more perpetuated than in many secular institutions. The church uses higher authority to defend status quo, while the absence of women in different sectors of the society could only be attributed to culture or lack of education, things that can easily be dealt with than Scripture and doctrines.

I prefer to call the church a "reforming" church than a reformed one, so that we are not static. As a reforming church, we are encountered with the challenge to use the Bible to advocate for justice and not to silence justice. We are called to revisit our *doctrines and our teachings if they are in accord with what we confess to be.*

Christ brought new life for humanity and the church is commissioned to perpetuate the transforming messages to all of its peoples. The impact of this new life is expected to be felt within the body of Christ and in the larger community. Unfortunately we cannot romanticize the Church when it comes to gender relationship and her role in perpetuating imbalance among God's people. African women in the continent and those

in diaspora continue to suffer various forms of discrimination such as: sexual, racial, religious, economic, political and cultural. In other words, in these areas, men get preferential treatment than women. Women and children consist a major force of labor in many African societies. Women work many hours from 14-16 hours a day. This is from housekeeping, farming, supplementing income, volunteer work in the society, etc. In the Women's world report of early 1990's, it is said that 80% of food produced in Africa is done by women, 90% of food processing is done by women and 50% of marketing. In general, the gender imbalance permeates all forms of the society and in this relationship, women suffer. And if women and children suffer then the community cannot be healthy and the relationship of sexes is not mutual but that of dependency, insecurity, of slave-master, etc.

African traditions and culture are among those oppressive patriarchal systems that need to be addressed even in the Lutheran communion. They are oppressive because they legitimize the domination of women by men. One of the visible and undeniable areas of imbalance relationships is in gender roles. For the most part, African men and women are aware of the clear-cut role distinctions between them. Their culture and traditions have delineated and defined a line of demarcation as to what each sex is supposed to do. Some African proverbs, songs and other linguistic imagery women are socialized to accept their role and place in the society. African oral traditions perpetuate women subordination through songs and proverbs. Mercy Amba Oduyoye who has done a study of the Akan proverbs affirms to this fact. The Gikuyu of Kenya like many other African peoples have similar proverbs. In one of the proverbs, women are compared to wind that cannot be trusted.

When a child is born in the Iraqw society, it is customary that a messenger to be sent to family members, relatives, and friends for the announcing of this new member of the society. The person sent or if the parent is being visited is normally asked: *Naay a mila?* This question literally means: “what sex is the child? The response is intriguing, because in some cultures the response will be straight forward “a boy or a girl”, but in Iraqw it is: “*heekuse* (for a girl), and *muk slaa* (for a boy). The sexes are identified and described by the role that each child is expected to play, “water carrier” (for a girl) and “a person of the forest’ (for a boy) is a normative, descriptive response.

From their early stages of life, children are socialized to know their role and place. In the early 1990’s when I was in Iowa (USA) I watched young girls from Malawi performing a Chichewa dance that was accompanied by a song: “*Amai yanga. . . pika sima*”. The song says: “Since I was young my mom taught me how to cook *sima* (a traditional food that is equivalent to *ugali* in East Africa and *fufu* in West Africa). Africa is a large continent; her people are many and varied, yet retaining numerous similarities in certain cultural patterns. Many of the African societies are patrilineal, that is a system of life where the father or male image is considered the head of the house and an authoritative figure. In such a system, male monopoly is evident in many spheres of life including economy, religion, leadership (politics), etc. Of course as we have indicated earlier, giving the vastness of the continent and the numerous diverging ethnic groups, we cannot generalize everything as an African practice. In some ethnic groups in Africa women play a very significant role in religious sphere. In some places women have tremendous freedom in the maintenance of the household. But even in these areas and

locations, women still work under the shadows of men or as lifting the name of the owner of the household.

This tendency is carried in the Christian religion. Angela West reviewing Daphne Hampson's book *After Christianity*, contends with her by saying: "Culture and religion have been male: formed by men with a "place" for women. But woman must resist this 'place' that has been prepared for her by men and seek instead self-actualization, and mutual self-realisation."<sup>23</sup> The effort to combat injustice and enhance transformation must be a joint effort of both sexes. Very often women injustices against women have been labeled "women issues" and not as human issues. Women's movements are regarded as dangerous, sinful, wrong, and mimicking Western culture.

When Christianity came to Africa, most of the cultural practices were regarded as animistic and wrong. They were therefore replaced by Western cultural variations. A Christian was not only expected to adapt to the new faith but had to adjust culturally as well. Two notable things took place in the process of Christianizing Africa. There were those cultural elements that the new faith failed to eliminate. They remained firmly embedded in people's lives. "Although the Christian church has struggled to replace them with other possibilities that passed for Christian culture, these African elements did not just survive the Christian onslaught-they adamantly resisted being touched. They continued to sprout and grow like the equatorial weed that is native to the land."<sup>24</sup> There were other things that happened. Christianity brought in her "justified culture" which replaces those that have been eliminated. But the new culture also sanctioned the native one. Some of the biblical texts, church practices and traditions supported their practices

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<sup>23</sup>Angela West "Justification by Gender' Scottish Journal of Theology 51 pg. 100

that undermine women, so they gain more authority not only to keep those cultural practices but also justify and sanction the place and status of women.

When new concepts are introduced, they affect traditional values, ideas, and ways, which in turn affect personal lives and relationships. This is an attempt to look at the practical side of the Lutheran doctrine of justification. How has the shift from traditional Roman Catholic theology to the new doctrinal teachings enhanced the relationships between sexes in the society? Were these changes beneficial or they too sidetracked the opportunities for God's children to live a wholistic life in relation to each other? Viewed in the of God's covenantal relationship to God's people, we are encountered both in the accounts of creation and redemption by the fact that God's relational model is that of wholeness and oneness. Exegetical endeavors and tasks of interpretation as well as the practice of the Church has many times obscured these modes. This is also true for the Bible itself because it originated from that cultural framework that subjugates women as weaker and lesser sex. If justification provides principles of biblical interpretation, has the Lutheran tradition been shaped and changed by this principle in respect to the relation of God's children in the community? Why are the Lutherans silent when it comes to dealing or speaking against women oppression in the society and why is the oppression of women prevalent in the church that professes the justice of God?

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<sup>24</sup> Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, The Will to Arise, 2.

### New Road to Justice and Gender

“By encountering the liberating message of the Gospel, African women have to engage in the sensitive process of questioning their cultural roots.”<sup>25</sup> This task has to be done fundamentally by women themselves who are victims of cultural oppression. Why do women need to do this task? In the past women issues were always voiced by men. Denise Ackermann comments as follows: “Women’s humanity, our experience, perceptions, thoughts and beliefs, have by and large been defined by men. This is particularly true in Christian tradition where women have been subjected to a “doctrine of man” (known as theological anthropology) which has tended to swing to extremes: we have been categorized as either the sinful Eve or the virtuous virgin Mary. This type of stereotyping has made scant allowance for us to define our own humanity.”<sup>26</sup> “Our authentic experience of ourselves plays no part in shaping the cultural and language reality in which we live. We are present as silent Other, as our reality finds no expressions in the accepted discourse.”<sup>27</sup> Women have to see that cultural domination has enslaved them and misled the church to truly stand by what it claims to confess. “Women who want to break the yoke of oppressive culture have to battle on two fronts. They have to shake their men into awareness of gender exploitation and they have to help women see how instrumental they are in perpetuating their own enslavement.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Renate Cochrane, “Equal Discipleship of Women and Men: Reading the New Testament from a Feminist Perspective”, in Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa, ed. Denise Ackermann, et als., (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1991) 22.

<sup>26</sup> Denise Ackermann, ‘Being Woman, Being Human’ in Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa, ed. By Denise Ackermann, et als., (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1991) 93.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Cochrane, 193.

Justice that we seek has to be justice for all. The presence or absence of justice is demonstrated by the way relationships function in the society. The absence of justice and the presence of wretched relationships are sins of omission that churches need to acknowledge and confess. This confession does not need to wait till Sunday morning, it has to be a daily struggle to actively involve ourselves wholeness of God's humanity. It has to be realized that to do so does not justify us, but that we walk as justified beings, both individually and as a community of believers. The Lutheran doctrine of justification tends to deal more with one to one relationship of God and the believer. African Lutheran cannot wholly demarcate the individual and the community. Having a right relationship with God means having a right relationship with your neighbor. It is time for Africa Christians to look at the neighbor who is a woman. Is your neighbor also a child of God, redeemed, justified as yourself? Is she enjoying the bounty and beauty of God's creation as you would have loved to cherish those bounties yourself?

“Women have in search for this inclusive kind of justice, defined justice as “communal right-relationship.” This means that that which is fair and equitable for all is based on the notion of being in the right relationship with one's neighbour. It is in essence a living out of the commandment of love your neighbour as yourself. As scriptures have shown us, love and justice are inseparable in making a true community. Thus all discrimination, patently a loveless and injustice practice, is sin. Anything that breaks relationships is understood as both collaboration with and apathy towards injustice. Both ignoring and/or perpetuating what constitutes an affront to women's humanity, is sinful.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ackermann, op. Cit., 94.

John Stek understands salvation and liberation as relational term. He remarks: "Salvation, justice and liberation- these cannot be understood in Old Testament perspective apart from Old Testament witness concerning man and his relationship to God, and his place in creation, and the course of history."<sup>30</sup> When the Bible speaks of justice and righteousness it speaks in relational terms. This relationship is that of love, gift, harmony or in one summarizing word: Shalom, the wholeness.

"Relationality is the key concept to understand what it means to be human from a woman's perspective. It emerges from my understanding of the injunction by Jesus Christ that "You must love your neighbour as yourself" (Mk 12:31). When I actively love myself and my neighbour, I practice right relationship. Communal right-relationship is the essence of justice-centred living and reflects the values of the "reign" of God.

The recognition of the full humanity of women does not merely demand theological assent. The injunction to "love your neighbour as yourself" is understood as practice of valuing women humanity. This practice is based on love and justice. A such it is relational."<sup>31</sup> Love and justice are constitutive of God's character and should also be a sing of God's children, visible and operative in the society. It is this force that creates the new community, community that is willing to turn back and admit being responsible for the distortion of God's creation, of breaching the relationship and community that desire to be challenged to seek transformation and renewal.

"The way forward is a "new community of men and women," not reversal; participation, not takeover or handover. Feminism in theology springs from a conviction that a theology of relationships might contribute to bring us closer to human life as God

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<sup>30</sup> John H. Stek, "Salvation, Justice and Liberation in the Old Testament", *Calvin Theological Journal* 12: 133-165 (1978), pg. 1333

desires it.”<sup>32</sup> How can we foster the building of this new community? Gender discussions and dialogue are very rare in our churches. Women issues are left to be discussed and deliberated by women themselves. To bridge the gap, we have to create more forums where men and women can meet and dialogue. For the church to succeed it has to take first bold steps of giving more priorities of educating women, make women issues and gender relationships as pivotal and crucial, and to vehemently involve in the advocacy for justice in the society. A reforming church is one that gives a prophetic voice in the community, not a church that is being made cozy by her doctrines. Luther endlessly analyzed doctrines in the light of the Bible and his faith and living were challenged by his discoveries. We as Black Lutherans are to assume the same process in our own locations.

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<sup>31</sup> Ackermann, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Oduyoye, in *Feminist Theology From the Third World*, pg. 34