

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES  
(A Christian Perspective)

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INTRODUCTION

**E**mpowering women through theological education is a movement that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century but spread rapidly and vigorously throughout the world especially in the poor countries of the Third World. The writer favors every thought, struggle and action that supports, propagates and fortifies this movement because empowering women respects the dignity of human life, recognizes the equality of men and women and promotes harmony among human persons.

Quite often the concept of empowering women through theological education is confused with other themes such as the discussion of women mentioned in sacred scriptures or in religious traditions. Empowering women can also be confused with another issue, namely, the rights of women. However, the approach adopted in these reflections goes a step further and speaks not 'about' women but 'from' the perspective of women.

The article challenges anything that is contrary to this approach and believes that once the 'status' of women has been clarified in the culture and religion of a particular society, the 'rights' of women will logically follow. In short, this article is a discussion from a woman's perspective of empowering women through theological education.

SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS:

Rights vs. Identity and Status

On women's day or during special programs conducted by the government, by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or by religious institutions, we often hear speakers talk about favors granted to women such as job opportunities, designations, certain quota representations in various departments of the government, etc. Furthermore, this is understood by men as the 'equality' endowed to women. The language of such speeches implies that women are being looked after, cared for and taken into consideration in society and in religion. I maintain that the real issue is not about the rights and authority of women in society and religion but rather about their *identity* as women and their *status* as human persons equal in dignity to men.

We should not deny, underestimate or close our eyes to the real issue, which concerns the identity and status of women. The rights of women should also demand our attention but our main concern in this article is the empowerment of women through theological education. In fact, theological education understood as the condition for obtaining a certain career or status in society may not be true theological education at all!

### Focusing on Problems

A second preliminary remark is that the theological education of women should not only be concerned with problem solving. Yet the prevailing state of affairs both in society as well as in religious institutions is focused on problem solving. The reason for such an approach in seminars and meetings, which have no time for a discussion of ideologies or theological perspectives, could be the result of historical paradigms and gender patterns. Discussion about the struggles that women experience, the emancipation of women, human rights or their representation in administration or leadership roles, focuses on only one aspect of a much broader vision of the empowerment of women through theological education.

The focus on the rights of women seems to presuppose that women are only asking for favors and concessions in their struggle to obtain what they have so far been deprived of. This *ad hoc* approach is defensive and seeks to find short cuts and temporary solutions to profound problems. Examples of such short sighted approaches could be a concern for human rights, women's emancipation, liberation from male domination or women's efforts to obtain positions of power and authority.

Examples of the sort of grievances mentioned above arise out of deep experiences of deprivation and discrimination. Expressing the feelings associated with such experiences can be a sign of defensiveness but can also lead to offensive and even aggressive behavior resulting in the hatred and the alienation of women as a group. Though such grievances are serious, they actually point to a deeper issue.

### Education as Empowerment

The third preliminary remark is that good education enables empowerment. In many religious institutions, theology is dominated by men and expressed in traditional terms and concepts. This type of male oriented thinking and speaking does not further the empowerment of women through theological education. Theology needs to be freed from male domination and from the use of traditional language that speaks the mind of men and uses their own forms of expression. The focus of the reflections in this article is the search for a theological basis for the theological education of women.

### RECONSTRUCTION OF FEMININE IDENTITY:

#### Historical Phases of the Women's Liberation Movement

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) started in the late 1960s and

has gone through three different phases.<sup>1</sup> Since women were considered incomplete, inferior, weak and imperfect human beings, the main focus and emphasis of this first phase was to emphasize the full and equal dignity of women. It had always been taken for granted that to be a full human being was to be male. The value of women was measured by men and in male terms. Eventually, women began to express their dissatisfaction with definitions of women produced only by men.

It was during this phase that women, through their growing awareness and intense efforts, began to understand that they were full and equal persons and that they did not require male leadership, protection, support and guidance in order to establish their identity as women. As a result of this phase, women reached the following conclusions that needed further attention:

1. Give attention to yourself, have trust and confidence in yourself and learn from the experience of women in other countries.
2. Critically analyze issues and problems as women and from a woman's perspective and beware of doing this from a male perspective.
3. Undertake research work on these and other similar issues.
4. Stop evaluating the worth of women according to a male perspective by adopting the vocabulary of men.

Another focus that was highlighted during this first phase was the political rights of women. In 1882, women had been in the forefront of the struggle to abolish slavery and to acquire the right to express their

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<sup>1</sup> The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) was a political alignment of women and feminist intellectuals that emerged in the late 1960s and continued into the 1980s primarily in the industrialized nations of the Western world. During this phase, women demanded equality with men and spoke out against institutional sexism. Their efforts resulted in significant political reforms throughout the world. Some of the most notable women active during this phase were Mary Wollstonecraft, Susan B. Anthony, Alice Stone Blackwell, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Emmeline Pankhurst and Sojourner Truth.

opinion through universal suffrage. In 1840, the movement for women's emancipation had been launched and women held a conference on the political rights and the political equality of women.<sup>2</sup>

The second phase of the WLM took place during the years 1960-1970. During these years, the movement developed the vision for the equal dignity for men and women and strove for the political equality of women so that they could participate in active politics and debate. The third phase of the WLM commenced in 1970. On 18 December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an International Women's Conference, was held.<sup>3</sup> This period saw the strengthening of solidarity among women and greater awareness of racial and socio-economic discrimination. Besides, in 1975, the UN set up International Women's Year.<sup>4</sup> In all these events, the integrity and equality of women was emphasized. Women should have full and equal rights and the opportunity for participation and leadership in every field of life. Special attention was given to the following three values: equality, solidarity and participation.

### Journeying in Solidarity

For the development of women's liberation, women need to journey in

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2. The early Women's Rights Movement for the abolition of slavery started in 1840. The first attempt to organize a national movement for women's rights occurred in Seneca Falls, New York, in July 1848. At this time, women were also granted the right to vote.

3. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was recognized by the United Nations General Assembly. It became an international treaty on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1981 after the twentieth country had ratified it. The Convention is composed of 23 experts, each of whom is nominated by their respective Governments. By the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1989, almost one hundred nations had agreed to be bound by its provisions.

4. International Women's Year (IWY) was the name given in 1975 by the United Nations. Since that year, 8<sup>th</sup> March has been celebrated as International Women's Day. The United Nations Decade for Women, from 1976 to 1985, was also established. The first UN World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1975. This Conference was attended by over a thousand delegates.

solidarity with women of other nations, countries, cultures and religions. There is no doubt that women of every cultural, political and economic background have to seek and enrich their own sense of identity and to develop their own way of doing theology. This needs to be done on a wider and broader ecumenical level. Women from Pakistan as well as from every other country, culture, race and religion need to journey together in the struggle for equality and justice. The purpose of this common journey is to learn about the struggles of women in other circumstances and in other areas of the world. However, it will always remain important to make a contribution to this global struggle from one's own context.

### Re-interpreting the Scriptures

The holy scriptures of most religious traditions in the world give evidence of the powerful and animating presence of women. In the Christian scriptures, for example, there is hardly a page that does not refer to the presence of women. They are present as animators, leaders of nations, guides of families, showing direction and playing a vital role in historical decisions. Even though the followers of religious traditions may be aware of only a few significant women who have played a significant role in their own religious tradition, nevertheless these religious traditions do present women as key actors in the history of families, tribes and nations.

The sad reality is that sacred writers, exegetes, preachers, teachers and law makers have been solely and almost exclusively male. Accordingly, women were only mentioned, described and interpreted from a male perspective and with a male bias. In the Christian liturgical lectionary, which provides readings from the sacred scriptures for worship services, for example, texts and readings that mention women were often omitted. When such liturgies are celebrated today, women who are present at these worship services feel excluded. Theologians, priests and liturgists

can no longer escape the challenge expressed vocally by women who demand that they be heard and that their presence be duly recognized.

Most of the research and study of sacred scripture that is undertaken for or by women is also restricted either to the mention of great women in the history of the religious tradition or to the teaching about women in this religious tradition. Moreover, all this is presented and evaluated from the perspective of men. Studies of sacred scripture neglect the important role that women play in the life of their family, culture, society and nation. Theological students are informed about what these women have said and achieved. But very often, knowingly or unknowingly, all this is done with a view to the promotion and the defense of the male members of society. In the past, women often raised their voice in protest against this tendency, which was evident both in academic and in social circles.

No aspect of human or social freedom in history has been made available on a platter but has always been the result of persistent effort. What is urgently needed today is that women start re-reading and re-interpreting the sacred scripture from a woman's point of view and attempt to express its meaning in the language with which women are comfortable. New forms of expression will free sacred scripture from an exclusively male interpretation with the result that the deeper meaning of scripture, which recognizes the dignity of both men and women, will be restored.

Another point to be emphasized while speaking about sacred scripture is that the Word of God also exists outside the written scriptures. God speaks through the events of history and the universe as well as through the written text. Moreover, the Word of God already existed before it was expressed in book form. Most Christian theologians accept the view that God continues to reveal God-self to humanity in multiple and mysterious ways. Many Christian scholars suggest that Christians should not limit the Word of God to its written version alone because God is present

among human beings and God is not limited to the use of a particular text.

God continues to reveal God-self in different contexts and in various circumstances to the nations and the cultures of the world. The Bible indicates how God has already spoken in certain social, religious and historical situations. It is the same God who speaks to believers of different faiths and religions in their own context. Moreover, God is not prejudiced with regard to gender. God has spoken to and through the women of every nation, culture, history and religion.

Women should make the sacred scripture their own and re-interpret it according to their specific context and from their particular perspective as women. They should not shy away or remain passive onlookers but contribute their own perspectives and critique. The Christian scripture, for example, contains four important events and dogmas concerning the economy of salvation. These are the Creation, the Redemption (Exodus), the Incarnation and the Resurrection (of Jesus Christ). All the other truths and dogmas in the Holy Bible revolve around these four great events, each of which is focused on certain women whose role is duly recognized.<sup>5</sup> In all these events, women play an important role as the main agent, coordinator and animator. However, these women have been presented in history as non-persons and their presence and dignity has been underestimated and even undermined because of male dominance in ecclesiastical structures. During the past thirty years, however, women have begun to read sacred scripture themselves and to claim their own place in social and ecclesiastical settings. Their interventions have led to fresh insights, which have often been inspiring for their male counterparts.

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<sup>5</sup> Eve plays a leading role in the story of Creation (Genesis, Chapters 2-3), Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, leads women to celebrate the Exodus when they sing, dance and praise God soon after Exodus (Exodus 15: 20-21), Mary of Nazareth, mother of Jesus, is proclaimed at the Incarnation (Gospel according to Luke 1: 26-38) and Mary Magdalene becomes the Apostle of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 20: 1-18).



## Liberating Theology

As was the case with sacred scripture, theology has likewise been interpreted according to male biases. There is an urgent need to liberate theology from such male perspectives. Empowered through theological education, women will discover the feminine face of God and a feminine theology of God based on the truth that all human beings have been created in the image of God (*imago dei*). Since the Hebrew word *Adam* is not gender specific, it refers to all human beings and stands for the whole of humanity.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, to refer to God in a gender specific way is to use anthropomorphic language despite the obvious fact that God has no gender and is without gender prejudice. Failure to recognize that women are created in the image and likeness of God is to deny the blessing of God.

Women are making themselves heard in the world of theology. Their wish is to be partners with men in a shared responsibility for their 'common home', as Pope Francis has stressed in his second encyclical, *Laudato si*. A new theological anthropology is developing and it is unstoppable because of God's own command to both men and women in the Book of Genesis to care for their 'common home'. In Christian theology, all believers are children of God and are, therefore, of equal value in the sight of God. Faith in Jesus Christ liberates believers from all sorts of cultural, racial and gender biases (Gal. 3:26 ff.). In fact, such a liberation is a prerequisite, condition and credential for membership in the *ecclesia*, a word that refers to the community of believers.

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<sup>6</sup> *Adamah*, a Hebrew word from which the word *Adam* has been derived, has a variety of meanings such as ground (as tilled and yielding sustenance), a piece of ground, a specific plot of land, earth substance (for building or constructing), ground as the earth's visible surface, land, territory, country, or the whole inhabited earth. The word *Adam* means man or mankind and is used as a collective word for all creatures, cf. Brown, Driver & Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. This Hebrew word is estimated to have been used 210 times in the Old Testament, mainly in Genesis (37), Deuteronomy (35), Isaiah (14), Jeremiah (18), and Ezekiel (27).

Becoming a disciple of Christ in the Christian tradition is not based on human merit but is purely a grace and gift of God. By faith in Christ and by following (putting on) Christ, a person shares in the life of Christ and becomes a member of the community of his followers. In this community, there is no longer any room for national, ethnic, cultural, social or gender discrimination. In Christ, all are one and equal. Any form of inequality would be contrary to the view of life presented in the Gospel and opposed to the way of life of a believer in Jesus Christ.

It is God's desire and plan that all human beings should come to participate fully in the life of God by becoming members of the family of God. Any discriminatory ideology or divisive force works against such full membership. For example, any gender-based prejudice would result in the refusal to recognize others as full members of the family of God. To insist on an ideology of preference, expressed in such concepts as 'the elect' or 'the pure' would be theologically untenable in the Christian understanding of the human person.

### Liturgical Silencing

The language adopted by practically every religion in its worship services uses male-oriented vocabulary. In the Christian community, for example, the language used in worship is largely gender biased and exclusivist. Even though women are excluded from the language of formal prayers and hymns, only a few women even notice that such is the case. It is strange that the women have to recite prayers and sing hymns using male oriented language. Although many women still attend worship services for the official prayers, their presence is not acknowledged and they are rarely addressed directly in this liturgical setting. Instead of remaining passive listeners and attendants during the liturgy, however, women should have the opportunity for equal, active and full participation in the worship of the community. If a woman can provide leadership for her family, act as the mother of her children and take lead roles in civil

activities linked to decision-making processes, why can women not lead the community in worship? Besides, what prevents them from preaching to the community of believers?

Women are also silenced from the memory of religious history. In the Catholic Sunday Lectionary, for example, narratives and descriptions of the role of women are infrequent.<sup>7</sup> It seems that silencing the witness of women has been done in a systematic way. In the readings taken from the Hebrew Scriptures, women are excluded, omitted or discarded as dangerous or scandalous. However, in the 1980s, women scholars became aware of gender specific language and they began to insist on inclusive language in worship services.<sup>8</sup> As a result, male specific language is gradually becoming less common. Changing the words of a text, however, is only a first step. The more significant challenge is to change men's attitudes towards women.

### Categorization Based on Gender

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the great personalities of India, exposed the flawed attitude according to which men usually see women as delicate and weak because men want to make them feel dependent and in need of male support, protection and guidance for the benefit and privilege of men. Gandhi demonstrated a very different approach in his freedom struggle and involved women as active participants, who were encouraged to voice their plight alongside men. He also held the view

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7. Many narratives of women have been omitted from the Sunday Lectionary, which is the assigned reading from the Holy Bible for Sunday worship service (Mass) in the Catholic Church. This was done through a document promulgated by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1969. See Kathleen MacInnis Kichline, *Never On Sunday: A Look at the Women NOT in the Lectionary*, Sister in Scripture, Part 2. Also cf. Katharine Jefferts-Schori, *Created In God's Image, a Gender Never On Sunday*.

8. An effort was made in 1983 to introduce a Holy Bible presenting God as male and female, as both the mother and father of humankind. This Bible was prepared by 11 biblical scholars. Cf. the article by Charles Austin in the New York Times on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1983, section 1, p. 1.

that the education of a man would simply be the accomplishment of one individual but the education of a woman would lead to the education of a whole community.

Categorization based on gender has been the result of male prejudice and has been done in order to subdue women. It is based on an attitude of superiority and inferiority and a hierarchal way of thinking. As a result, women are not given pastoral, administrative and evangelical responsibilities. But all positions of leadership in religious traditions ought to be open to all believers because no profession (except parenting) is exclusively based on gender or biological considerations that are unique to women.

Empowerment and emancipation of women through theological education will also include the effort to change traditional male oriented and male dominant structures in the community of believers. No ministries, service or religious leadership should be assigned and entrusted to anyone merely on account of his or her gender. Both men and women reflect the divine attributes of God by being gifted with different God-given talents. Hence, to understand spiritual ministries as divinely ordained but, at the same time, to continue allocating certain ministries only to males is a lingering sign of bureaucratic interference, which needs to be dealt with by visionary thinking.

### The Status of Women in Religious Traditions

One of the most urgent challenges facing religious traditions today is recognition of the human and religious status of women. It is not a question of granting concessions or favors to women but rather of re-defining and restoring their original role and giving back to women what they have been deprived of. Gender cannot be a determining factor of one's membership of a religious tradition.

No human, historical law is above God's law. No constitution, no matter how ancient or sacred it may be, has the right to consider women as less human on the grounds of gender. Every believer ought to speak out against anything and everything that is contrary to human dignity and life. One ought to oppose all that discriminates and divides humanity or makes human persons unequal, inferior or superior, oppressed or oppressor. Religion can act as a front runner in the claim for the equality of all persons. Sadly, however, not all religious traditions have spoken up to defend human dignity and justice.

### Sanctifying Human Culture

Whenever we discuss the status of women in religion and society, we have to deal with cultural limitations and restrictions. It is to be hoped that greater awareness and empowerment brought to women through theological education will purify and sanctify human culture and transform it in accordance with the will of God. In this way, human culture will reflect a dimension of divine culture.

Religions exist in order to transform prevailing cultural patterns by providing alternative cultural perspectives that are enriched by the contribution of theology, the history of preaching and the experience of interreligious relations. Religious traditions can sometimes be critical of the accepted way of behavior of a given society. A person becomes a believer or remains part of a particular religious tradition because he or she agrees with the alternative culture presented by this religion despite the challenges it may present to the customs and behavior patterns of society. The alternative values of one's chosen religious tradition will take precedence over one's earlier beliefs and values while allowing for some degree of compromise as well.

Whenever social practices are under the sway of historical, traditional and organizational patterns of behavior or influenced by gender based

prejudices, the teaching of a religion should challenge these generally accepted patterns of behavior. Religions introduce different values, moral values and ethical paradigms such as those expressed in the 'Sermon on the Mount' in the Gospel of Matthew.

In many countries of the world women are not given equal opportunities and their achievements are not duly recognized. This means that a large section of humanity is still not being justly treated. The prophetic voice of religious traditions can be very effective in condemning oppressive structures and practices and in rejecting historical and cultural customs that dehumanize women. Religions have a duty to be actively involved in enabling women to become fully human and fully alive.

#### THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

##### Education and Empowerment

Theological education awakens critical thinking and provides insight into religious truths that hitherto may have remained obscure. Theological education produces insight into the historical contexts in which certain doctrines arose and were formulated. Such insight will reveal that these doctrines were responding to the concerns of a specific society. Hence, theological education can provide the tools to understand expand and liberate oneself from certain forms of misunderstanding about one's religious tradition. Furthermore, such education does not only provide academic training but also opens access to new information, which leads to intellectual formation and to personal transformation.

Theological education and the empowerment of women ought to include a woman's perspective on crucial issues such as political theology and ecology, both of which are important subjects for theological reflection today. Those responsible for the theological education and empowerment of women should be aware that equipping women with the tools of theology may help uncover hidden sources of new knowledge, which

their male counterparts may not have thought ever existed. It is clear that the prevailing theology taught in all or most theological seminaries is dominated by males and also resourced from dominantly male scholarship. In such circumstances, the theological empowerment of women can take place only after the removal of such male dominance so as to create space for the acceptance of women's perspectives as a source of knowledge and skill.

The de-construction of male-dominant theology and the re-formulation of theology by the inclusion of women's language and perspectives is an urgent need of contemporary theology. This will require a new kind of theological leadership by women and men, who are ready to forge ahead collaboratively to adopt multi-disciplinary approaches to the social sciences. This, in turn, will lead to new areas of theological reflection. The success of such a project will require dedication to serious scholarship that uses new theological vocabulary.

Institutes of theological education need to reject all forms of discrimination in their thinking as well as in their practice. Women's studies is a branch of theology just as feminist theology is only one, though a very significant, area of theology. Not all women who study theology are engaged in feminist theology or are feminists in their thinking. In fact, there are male theologians who are not only sympathetic towards feminist theology but are actively involved in feminist theology themselves.

Theological education should enable women to contribute a feminine perspective to the understanding of revelation as well as to other areas of theological investigation. The feminine way of doing theology asks different questions and engages in different topics for discussion in order to discover new theological insights. We salute all those women, mothers and sisters, who have been courageous enough to set out on the feminine theological journey, thereby becoming pioneers in the field of feminine

theology, not in opposition to their male counterparts but in order to articulate a different perspective.

### Construction of a Feminist Theology

Three phases can be identified in the process of constructing feminist theology. The first phase concentrated on doing theology as an academic practice. This was the concern of white women from the secular, first world whose interests were mainly economic and political. They produced books with titles such as: 'The Church and the Second Sex', 'Beyond God the Father', 'Meta Ethics of radical Feminism' and so on.<sup>9</sup>

The second phase was characterized by the rigorous efforts of women to dislodge the ideology of patriarchy and to dismantle the practice of male domination. A lot of material has been written in various books and periodicals about the issues that were highlighted during this period.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, a third phase came into existence when some white women theologians began to challenge patriarchal theology, which had developed over several centuries.<sup>11</sup> In patristic theology, which is the term used for the study of the theological teachings of the Church

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<sup>9</sup>. For example, books authored by Mary Daly (1928-2010): *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968); *Beyond God the Father*; *GYN/ Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*.

<sup>10</sup>. To name a few: Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990); M. C. Elliot, *Freedom, Justice & Christian Counter-Culture* (London, SCM Press, 1990); Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Motherhood and God*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984); J. Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in the Religions of the World* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970); Joyce Hollyday, *Clothed with the Sun: Biblical Women, Social Justice and Us* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); also see Saiving, Valerie (1960), "The Human Situation: A Feminine View", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 28 (1) 1975; vide Moder, Ally, "Women, Personhood, and the Male God: A Feminist Critique of Patriarchal Concepts of God in View of Domestic Abuse", *Feminist Theology*, 28 (1) 2019.

<sup>11</sup>. Buckley, Cheryl, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design Issues", *The MIT Press*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Autumn, 1986), p. 3-14; Veronica Beechey, "On Patriarchy", *Feminist Review*, No. 3 (1979), p. 66-82; Abeda Sultana, *Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis*; Jagger, M. A. and Rosenberg S. P. (eds.), 1984. Also see Alison Jagger, *Feminist Frameworks*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989).



Fathers, and in the exegesis of the Hebrew scriptures, there was hardly any female voice that was acknowledged, not even the women who saved, nursed and protected the Prophet Moses, the leader of the Jewish slaves in Egypt who became the 'Exodus women'. The New Testament narratives relate that women, portrayed by men as weak, were the first to see Jesus Christ after his resurrection from the dead and were brave enough to announce that 'he is risen from the dead' to the fearful followers of Jesus. These women became the 'Easter women' of the good news.

A woman's role in society is not something that can be bestowed on women by those who belong to the patriarchal system. Rather, women have inherited this role by the will of God who created them in the image of God (*imago dei*). Theological education is an endowment by faith through which they are entitled to learn about their Creator in their own way. Religious traditions should find ways for women to make their own contribution to theological education and thereby to reach their full potential as women.

### Opportunities for Theological Education

Feminine theology will not develop by simply pleading and begging for concessions and favors from men. Women must beware of being provoked by the traditional male-oriented language used by men, who praise women and promise them various favors and privileges. The traditional, male-dominated culture is still very powerful and persuasive. Unfortunately, many women from traditional backgrounds prefer to imitate the way their mothers were instructed by their brothers, husbands and uncles. Traditional social and cultural taboos are still strong and women are still compelled and bound by these social restrictions simply because they are females. Although not every man practices such discrimination against women, it is still the dominant behavior pattern of the prevalent patriarchy. Women must join hands with men to liberate

themselves from social and cultural bondage, which can be kept in place by religious bigotry. Men and women must work together to become aware of their unique identity.

Since every form of dependency leads to a lack of self-confidence as well to domination and enslavement, women must become free of their dependency on men in order to become well integrated persons. For this purpose, women need to develop a language that makes full use of feminine expressions, symbols and myths with which they can re-interpret history from a feminine perspective.

## CONCLUSION

Instead of a narrow-minded and short-sighted outlook, which restricts women to predetermined roles within society, both women and men need to acquire a vision for new possibilities. Through theological education, women will gain the empowerment they need to liberate themselves from their culturally defined and unfairly restricted status in society. The liberation of women is not only a project by women for women but will also liberate men from their ignorance of the equal status of men and women. In fact, this is the mission of God (*missio dei*) to which men and women are invited to participate. This vision is part of the hope and aspiration of the liberating notion of 'a new heaven and a new earth' as explicated so well in the Hebrew-Jewish and the Greek-Christian scriptures. These scriptures offer men and women the possibility to collaborate in the fulfillment of God's purposes in the world.