

Prüller-Jagenteufel / Bong / Perintfalvi (eds.)

Towards Just Gender Relations

Rethinking the Role of Women
in Church and Society

Vienna University Press





unipress

Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society

Band 13

Herausgegeben von Kurt Appel, Christian Danz,
Jakob Helmut Deibl, Rüdiger Lohlker, Richard Potz
und Sieglinde Rosenberger



Die Bände dieser Reihe sind peer-reviewed.

Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel / Sharon Bong /
Rita Perintfalvi (eds.)

Towards Just Gender Relations

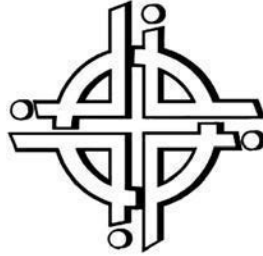
Rethinking the Role of Women in Church
and Society

V&R unipress

Vienna University Press



universität
wien



Weltgebetstag der Frauen – Deutsches Komitee e.V.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

**Veröffentlichungen der Vienna University Press
erscheinen im Verlag V&R unipress GmbH.**

The editors wish to thank their partners (Communicantes, Hünemann Foundation, Missio Aachen, Renovabis and Weltgebetstag) who helped in financing this book.

© 2019, V&R unipress GmbH, Robert-Bosch-Breite 6, D-37079 Göttingen
Alle Rechte vorbehalten. Das Werk und seine Teile sind urheberrechtlich geschützt.
Jede Verwertung in anderen als den gesetzlich zugelassenen Fällen bedarf der vorherigen schriftlichen Einwilligung des Verlages.

Umschlagabbildung: RaT-Logo (Gerfried Kabas, Wien).
Redaktion: Marlene Deibl
Druck und Bindung: CPI books GmbH, Birkstraße 10, D-25917 Leck
Printed in the EU.

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN 2198-5235
ISBN 978-3-8470-0985-6

Contents

Foreword	9
Preface	13
I. The Tagaytay Conference July 14–17, 2016	
Virginia Saldanha (Mumbai)	
Women at the Grassroots' Level of Church Leadership	19
Gemma Simmonds (London)	
Women at the Grassroots' Level of Church Leadership (II)	29
Kochurani Abraham (Kerala)	
Female Deacons and Women's Clerical Ordination	37
Angela Berlis (Bern)	
Restoring the Female Diaconate in the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht	47
Christine E. Burke IBVM (Manila)	
Women as Ministers of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?	61
Shalini Mulackal PBVM (Delhi)	
Women Religious as Vanguard of Women Participation: A Critical Study of the Role of Women Religious in the Church and Society	71
Teresa Forcades i Vila OSB (Monastery of Montserrat)	
Religious Women as Vanguard of Women Participation in Church and Society	81

Margaret Beirne RSC (Sydney) “Women Leadership in the Church”: Foundations in the New Testament	91
Ramon Echica (Cebu) The Philippine Church: Beyond Clericalism in her Relations with the State	103
Eamonn Conway (Limerick) A Church beyond Clericalism	121
Sharon Bong (Bandar Sunway) Feminine Genius: Revisiting Gender Complementarity Today	137
Martin Lintner (Bressanone) / Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel (Vienna) Gendered Issues: A Critical Perspective on Catholic Sexual Ethics	147
Serena Noceti (Florence) Women in a New Ecclesiology of the Laity	163
II. The Vienna Conference. September 22–25, 2016	
Marianne Heimbach-Steins (Münster) Breaking Down Barriers, Creating Connections. Ways Towards a Constructive Gender Debate in the Catholic Church and Theology	179
Gerhard Marschütz (Vienna) Surprisingly Bad. Theological Notes on Catholic Gender Critique	199
Elzbieta Adamiak (Koblenz-Landau) The Social, Political and Religious Exchange over Gender Justice in Central and Eastern Europe, with Special Focus on Poland	215
Maria K. Moser (Vienna) Beyond Victimization. Women Claim Speech and Responsibility	231
Saskia Wendel (Cologne) Equality and/or Difference – a Gender-Sensitive Image of God	245
Maaïke de Haardt (Nijmegen) Mary: Portrait of an Im/Possible Image?	259

Janine Redemann (Vechta) Strengthening the Role of Women in Ecclesiastical Decision-Making Processes	277
Agnethe Siquans (Vienna) What's the Difference? Female Prophets in Early Christian Writings	283
Tallessyn Grennfell-Lee (Massachusetts) Gender and Inclusive Liturgy: Patriarchy, Liturgical Language, and Liberation	289
Nadja Furlan Štante (Maribor) Postmodern Perception of the Role of Women in Environmental Sensitization of the Roman Catholic Church	295
Larissa Hrotkó (Budapest) The Social, Political and Religious Conflicts about Gender in Hungary and Hungarian Judaism	303
Lídia Balogh (Budapest) The Evolution of Gender Roles and the Situation of Women in the Context of Protestant Traditions	309
About the Authors	317

Foreword

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis urged theologians to contribute to a renewed theology of women and to reflect on how decision-making spaces of the Church can be opened up to receive the specific contribution of women:

“I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families, and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because ‘the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace’¹ and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures. [...] This presents a great challenge for pastors and theologians, who are in a position to recognize more fully what this entails with regard to the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church’s life” (nos. 103–104). Elsewhere Pope Francis affirmed: “I must acknowledge that we are somewhat behind in developing of [sic!] theology of women. We have to progress in that area.”²

INSeCT, the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology, has taken up this call of Pope Francis and launched a Global Research Project called “A question of gender justice: the role of women in decision-making in different areas of church and society”.

INSeCT is a worldwide network of nearly 30 societies for Catholic Theology from across the Globe. Founded in 1996, it aims to foster academic theology and theological research on various continents through communication among the members societies, particularly concerning information about projects and work in progress, the result of academic research and theological congresses, conventions, and meetings. The Network encourages research within theological

1 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 295.

2 Pope Francis, in-flight press conference from the USA to Rome on September 27, 2015. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150927_usa-conferenza-stampa.html.

disciplines and stimulates interdisciplinary, ecumenical, and interreligious work in the interest of academic theology.

INSeCT launches regularly three-year Global Research Projects. The General Council of the Network, which is made up by the Executive Committee and the Presidents of the member societies and meets every three years, discusses and decides the topic. The Project “*A question of gender justice: the role of women in decision-making in different areas of church and society*,” from 2014–2017, wanted to take up Pope Francis’s call for a renewed theology of women and was seen at the same time as the logical follow-up from the previous topic 2011–2014, “*The nature, function and location of theology, with particular attention to the power of theology to overcome power abuse in church and society*.”³ The reflection on theology and power with special attention given to the sexual abuse crisis, and religion and politics, brought international Catholic together scholars for a renewed, practical, and theoretical exploration of power and its uses and abuses.

Today’s global challenges – poverty, violence, war, ecological disasters, and human rights violations resulting from ethnic, religious, and gender discrimination – all especially affect women. Gender issues, therefore, require the special attention of the church and all disciplines of theology.

Of course, there is much discussion today about the concept of “the feminine.” Furthermore, it is impossible to redefine the role of women in church and society without also discussing the role of men. INSeCT’s task was to foster a broad theological discussion on sex and gender.

The arguments about gender are highly controversial, both within the church as well as in non-Christian and secular contexts. Within the Catholic Church, there is a tendency to lump all gender theories together and label them “ideological.” For example, in *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis speaks of “various forms of an ideology of gender that ‘denies [sic!] the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family’” (AL 56). Even though the Pope recognizes a central thesis of Gender theories, i. e., to distinguish, but not separate biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) (cf. AL 56; 286), he complains that “this ideology leads to educational programs and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time” (AL 56).

Without doubt, there are various forms of ideological gender theories, but at the same time it is wrong to judge all forms of Gender theories as ideological and, therefore, to deny an open, critical, and academic dialogue with them.

3 See Stephen Bullivant et al. (ed), *Theology and Power. International Perspectives*, Paulist Press 2016.

There is the clear danger of ideological “anti-genderism,” especially within the Church. In response to this tendency, an open, differentiated discussion is essential, because the refusal to engage in open dialogue and discourse is in itself ideological. Gender justice, gender equality, and the basic human rights of men and women are key questions for a worldwide ethical discussion, especially with regard to the role of religion(s) in society. The commitment to gender justice and equality requires further sociological, anthropological, and theological reflection. As theologians, we face the challenge to contribute, even more because this is a precondition to “recognize more fully what this entails with regard to the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church’s life” (EG 104).

INSeCT encouraged all of its member societies to engage in open and diverse discussions about this topic, with an open mind towards an unambiguous option for the underprivileged, and a clear outlook on particular regional and historical contexts. Member societies of the Network had been asked to interpret and respond to the research project in a way that is relevant to their specific regional contexts. Many member societies all around the world have responded positively to this invitation and solicitation. The present volume is the fruit of two International Conferences in July and in September 2016, which involved the European Society for Catholic Theology (ESCT) and various Asian Theological Societies as the Australian Catholic Theological Association (ACTA), the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines (DaKaTeo), Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), the Indian Theological Association (ITA), and the Indian Women Theologians Forum (IWTF). Both conferences were organized in collaboration with the European Society of Women in Theological Research (EWSTR).

I would like to thank all those who have organized these two conferences and contributed towards their success. First of all, I thank Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel, who coordinated the ESCT research efforts for the INSeCT project, Rita Perintfalvi, who was the contact person on behalf of EWSTR and co-organised the International Conference in Vienna, Dennis Gonzalez, President of DaKaTeo and co-organizer of the International Conference in Tagaytay, Manila, and Sharon Bong, member of EWA, who, along with Prüller-Jagenteufel and Perintfalvi, is co-editing this volume.

Finally, it is also appropriate at this stage to thank the International Catholic Mission Society MISSIO in Aachen, Germany, and RENOVABIS, an action for mutual solidarity of the German Roman Catholics with the people of Central and Eastern Europe, for their financial support of theologians from Asia and from Central and Eastern Europe who have attended the Conferences.

Martin M. Lintner
President of INSeCT 2014–2017

Preface

The European Society for Catholic Theology (ET) has taken up the INSeCT Global Research Project 2014–2017 “A question of gender justice: the role of women in decision-making in different areas of church and society” by organizing two conferences – both are here documented providing special insights into processes of intercultural dialogue – the first one between Asia and Europe, the second one within Europe, especially between the Western and the Eastern Central European societies.

The first conference was a joint venture by ET and the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines (DaKaTeo), a symposium held in Tagaytay in July 2016. Participants were invited from Europe – ET and the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR) – and throughout Asia-Oceania – DaKaTeo, the Australian Catholic Theological Association (ACTA), Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), the Indian Theological Association (ITA), and the Indian Women Theologians’ Forum (IWTF). The topic for the European-Asian dialogue focused on “Gender and Ecclesiology”. Eight subtopics were presented and discussed by one Asian and one European theologian each. The fruits of these discussions make for the first part of this volume. This part gives a profound insight into the intercultural debate on gender issues in the Asian and the European Catholic church. Virginia Saldhana (India) and Gemma Simmonds (United Kingdom) write about their experiences of women at the grassroots’ level of church leadership. Kochurani Abraham (India) and Angela Berlis (Switzerland) give insights on question of women’s ordination, especially the diaconate; Chris Burke (Manila) puts the question if women should not be installed as ministers of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Shalini Mulackal (India) and Teresa Forcades (Spain/Catalonia) discuss how women religious make the vanguard of women’s participation in the church; Margaret Beirne (Australia) shares insights on women leadership in the Old and New Testament. Ramon Echica (Philippines) and Eamonn Conway (Ireland) aim at a church beyond clericalism; Sharon Bong (Malaysia) and Martin Lintner together with Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel have a deeper look at the question of

gender complementarity with special focus on Catholic sexual ethics; and Serena Noceti (Italy) explores the role of women in a new ecclesiology of the laity.

The second conference was hosted by the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Vienna (Austria) and the Viennese “Forum Zeit und Glaube” of the Society of Catholic Academics in September 2016. Here the topic was not so much focused on church practice but had a special aim for gender theories and their theological and political implications: “The Role of Women in Political and Ecclesial Decision-Making Processes – Ideological and Practical Issues between Gender ‘Ideology’ and Gender Justice”. Six keynote speeches that have been published previously in German in the bi-annual magazine “ET Studies” (vol. 8, issue 1, 2017) are republished in English: Marianne Heimbach-Steins (Germany) explores “Ways towards a constructive gender debate in the Catholic church”; Gerhard Marschütz (Austria) has a thorough look at the criticism of gender studies in the Catholic church; Elzbieta Adamiak (Germany/Poland) analyzes the conflicts round the gender debates in Eastern Central Europe; Maria Katharina Moser (Austria) looks at women beyond victimization; Saskia Wendel (Germany) is proposing gender sensitive images of God; and Maaïke de Hardt shows Mary as an im/possible image.

The Viennese documentation is completed by a half a dozen of the fifteen papers that have been presented at the conference. Janine Redemann (Germany) pleads for a strengthening of women’s participation in ecclesial decision making processes; Agnethe Siquans explores female prophets in early Christian writings; Tallessyn Grenfell-Lee (USA) shows the possibilities of gender sensitive liturgies; Nadja Furlan Štante (Slovenia) presents women in the environmental sensitization of the Catholic church. Larissa Hrotko (Hungary) has a look at the conflicts about gender in Hungarian Judaism; and Lidia Balogh (Hungary) gives special emphasis on the evolution of gender roles in the Protestant traditions.

The editors are proud and happy to present this collection of culturally diverse approaches to the questions of gender justice by that being able to foster the academic discourse as well as the practical debates on gender issues in the Catholic Church and beyond – reaching out to our respective societies.

The editors also want to thank not only the authors of this volume but also the translators and proof readers: Caroline Ayasse, Patrick Eldridge, Elaine Griffiths, and Marshall Cody Staton have done a marvellous job. We also thank Daniel Kuran and Marlene Deibl for the layout and the current communication with the publishers.¹ We also give thanks to the publishers of RaT to accept this volume in

1 For the sake of authenticity we largely maintained the character of the spoken word. We also kept the different styles of references, not wanting to rank one culture higher than the other. Even if the styles of the articles are different now we hope this will be understood as representation of the cultural manifold INSeCT represents.

their series. Last but not least we give our thanks to Communicantes, the Hünermann Foundation, Missio Aachen, Renovabis, the German committee of “Weltgebetstag der Frauen”, and an especially generous anonymous donor for their financial support. Without them, this volume could not have been published.

We hope that the ideas we are able to share in this volume will prove stimulating for the ongoing discussion on gender issues in our churches and societies.

Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel
in the name of all the editors

I. The Tagaytay Conference July 14–17, 2016

Virginia Saldanha (Mumbai)

Women at the Grassroots' Level of Church Leadership

1. Introduction

The idea of Church at the grassroots concretized in Asia with the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) articulating this vision in 1990. The bishops called it 'A New Way of Being Church' and describe it as "a communion of communities," where "laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers" (FABC V, 8.1.1). A Desk created by the Bishops to implement this vision, called the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) says it is working to change the style of leadership from top down to "a collaborative leadership."¹

The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) adopted this vision as their pastoral priority in 1992². In 1992 the CBCI also established a Desk for Women under the Commission for Laity, which in 1996 was raised to the status of a Commission, and then progressively demoted between 2011–2014 to an Office, and now as a Council for Women is back under the Commission for Laity in the CBCI. Its work is to empower women. In 2010, the CBCI published a Gender Policy, which aims for the "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society"³ based on the scriptural equality of women in Gen.1:27, however, there is no framework for its implementation. My introduction shows the different structures created by the bishops for lay participation and leadership as well as for women's empowerment in India. My paper, first takes a look at the experiences of some pioneering women leaders in SCCs, then, examines women's experience of leadership in parishes obtained through some interviews and questionnaires. I

1 Statement of the 2nd Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA II) General Assembly, no. 3.4 New Style of Leadership pg. 107, "For All the Peoples of Asia", Vol. 3, Federation of Asian Bishops' Confernces Documents from 1997 to 2001, Ed. Franz Josef Eilers SVD., Published by Claretian Publications, Manila, March 2002.

2 SCCs in Mumbai, <http://www.mumbaiscc.in/sccinmumbai> (26.05.2016).

3 The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India, published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Commission for Women, Dec. 2010.

then present a critical socio-theological analysis of the findings in these responses with a short conclusion.

2. Pioneering Women's Experience in SCCs in India

Sr. Christin Joseph HC and Sr. Martina L. Thabah MSMHC used their experience of the SCCs in the Philippines to create a dream of forming SCCs in their home country. They worked hard, with determination, collaborating with men to realise their dream.⁴ As a parish priest, the former Archbishop of Delhi tried to create SCCs but it collapsed when he left the parish, because priests were not interested. Later as Archbishop, he recruited Sr. Gemma and Sr. Suja to help him form SCCs in the archdiocese.⁵ The 2012 National Report of SCCs in India speaks of an unnamed Sister who visited several villages with a catechist to encourage the Gospel Sharing among communities. She found only women present. So she went in search of the men whom she found sitting together drinking alcohol. She sat with them, befriended them and finally convinced them to come to the Gospel Sharing in the community.⁶

The Society of the Helpers of Mary (SHM) joined a team of four priests in two experimental parishes to implement the vision of Vatican II. Sr. Seema SHM co-founded Jagruti Kendra⁷ with the priests, through which they started neighbourhood community groups in the parish. The sisters together with the community leaders organized the communities on social, civic and parish issues following the teachings of *Lumen Gentium* “the laity by their very vocation seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God.” (LG #31) The team demonstrated that it was possible to implement the mission of the Church in the inter-religious context of India. The majority of participants in the community were women from different faith traditions who were directly responsible for the success of the Basic Human Communities as they were called in these two parishes. The sisters were able to draw out the women who would not have responded to priests (males) attempting to break new paths in the community. The women trained by the sisters were so empowered that even though they were unlettered, they went from parish to parish to start inter-religious women's groups in slum neighbourhoods. Sr.

4 Pioneers of SCCs in India, <http://www.sccind.org/home/inner/15> (31.05.2016).

5 Ibid.

6 <http://www.fabc.org/offices/olaity/docs/Report of National Council of SCC Meeting in India 2012.pdf> (03.05.2016).

7 Jagruti Kendra is the community Centre established in the parish of Jeri Mari. It was the hub where all the work in the community of the two parishes in Jeri Mari and Saki Naka was coordinated.

Seema SHM was the pioneer sister in this project since its inception in 1988. Her strong assertiveness negotiated a space for the sisters to work with the priests as partners and collaborators in the project. Today, an SHM sister is Director of Jagruti Kendra.⁸

These stories demonstrate women's commitment, skill, creativity and ability in bringing about change in communities. These women are like the foundresses of the House Churches in the apostolic times; they were instrumental in founding grassroots 'churches' in India.

3. Experience of the Gender Stereotypes⁹

The majority leaders in SCCs are women. Most of them are in the age group of 50–70, an age when they are free of their child rearing responsibility. Many of them are widows. Women working outside the home retire at 60 and look for an opportunity to be out of the house doing something altruistic with their time and talents. It also gives them an opportunity to be recognized and appreciated in the community. It brings them fulfillment and builds their self-confidence. Where men are involved, they automatically assume leadership while the women do the work of the community under their direction. Women seem to be content to play a subservient role, happy to 'help' their male coordinator, but the ultimate control of the SCCs is with the priest.

In the Archdiocese of Bombay, the Community coordinator is supposed to carry the voice of the people in their community to the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) meetings and the discussion at the PPC has to be brought back to the community. But this does not happen. Women coordinators who asked questions stated that they were not heard. Women coordinators work alongside their animators. The programmes carried out in the community are traditional and pious (like saying the rosary, way of the cross in lent, etc.) coupled with get-togethers to build camaraderie. No discussions or reflections on women's issues take place, perhaps for fear of disturbing the status quo. The training programmes reinforce the clerical and hierarchial model of Church and the consultative role of lay leaders in the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) (canon.536.2). Therefore, women generally remain silent in the PPC. There is absolutely no training for the empowerment of women in the context of realizing their equality with men in the Church. The tendency to rope in women who are 'doers' and not 'thinkers' is clear. Most women fall into the traditional mould of submissive,

⁸ Interview with Sr. Seema SHM was done on 23rd June 2016.

⁹ Culled from the responses to a Questionnaire I sent out to women working with SCCs in Mumbai.

passive and obedient, who would not take on challenges that could threaten the status quo in the Church. The high value given to acceptance from priests and bishops ensures the status quo for both lay leaders and clerics.

Women's leadership style is negatively affected by the teaching that man is head of the household (Eph 5: 23) which is emphasized by popular conservative family movements that reinforce women's subordination. Men increasingly get involved into the SCCs but are more interested in being boss rather than a co-worker in the community. Women feel the pressure to balance family commitments and community work, with little or no support from husbands. One woman expressed the wish that her husband would help with housework so that she would become a bit freer to do her work in the community.

Women's work in the community fills a big lacuna in pastoral ministry. There is no doubt that this work is considerably appreciated by the community which itself is very traditional and steeped in religiosity. Though it brings women fulfillment and builds their confidence, it reinforces the fact that as women their nurturing skills are essential to this work. As Joan Chittister points out, "Nurturance is indeed the only role comfortably awarded to women. The fact is that apart from motherhood and homemaking, little else but 'nurture' has been open to women to satisfy their need for fulfillment"¹⁰

While the Gender Policy is based on "Woman and man created in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:27) there seems to be no effort to make this a reality in the running of the SCCs, where the majority of women exercise leadership at the very grassroots of the Church. In his foreword the then President of the CBCI stated, "The Policy promotes the egalitarian message of Jesus, with the vision of a collaborative Church with Gender Justice. It envisages a world where both women and men can enjoy total freedom and equality to grow in the image and likeness of God."¹¹ Yet women remain subservient to the priests, and are easily controlled by them. At home, they are saddled with household responsibility and wish that husbands should at least 'help' them so that they are not under so much pressure to take care of the family and their responsibility in the community.

The stated mission of the CBCI Council for Women is "To stimulate reflection in the Church on its mission to form a *discipleship of equals*"¹² and to contribute to the process of creating a gender just church and society... Yet, there is no

10 Dr. Pauline Chakalakal dsp, in "Discipleship, a space for women's leadership?" pg. 282 Pauline Publications, Pauline Sisters Bombay Society, 2004, quoting Joan Chittister in "Job's Daughters", pg. 39.

11 Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, in the Foreword to "Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India" published by the Commission for Women, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, 2010.

12 CBCI Office for Women, <http://cbci.in/all-Commissions/women.aspx> accessed on 8th June, 2016.

concerted attempt to create awareness about the CBCI Gender Policy in the SCCs. A study was done by Streevani, Pune, in 2013 “on the ‘role of women in the Church’ in the light of the Gender Policy. It covered nine dioceses across the country. Members of parish councils were chosen as respondents.”¹³ In India, members of parish councils are largely the leaders in their respective SCCs. The survey found that only 16 % or 142 of the 1000 respondents had read the Policy. 370 or 40 % had heard about the Policy and 44 % or 488 had not heard about the document. Given that 63 % of the respondents were women, the ignorance about a document that pertains to their lives, especially given the extent of violence to women in India, and the submissive status of women, is of concern. Anecdotally, every Indian woman at some stage in her life experiences violence either at home, in the street or in public space, or in the workplace.

4. Women Struggle to Break the Gender Mould

For culturally conservative women, the opportunity to come out of their homes to participate in social programmes is itself a big step. Even the opportunity to sit with a priest and discuss anything is a big social shift. The SCC work has socially empowered women giving them the opportunity to sit with other women and sometimes even with men, without their domineering husbands overseeing their activities. For widows, spaces designated as ‘Church work’ are acceptable for their participation outside the home. Hence, widows readily come forward to offer their service as community animators.

Women value Gospel Sharing. If done from a feminist perspective, it is a tool for empowerment and building faith. One group who usually share from feminist a perspective say they are silent when the priest is present.¹⁴ Sr. Seema SHM empowered women through negotiation with bishops and clergy. She points out that sisters may or may not be successful in partnership with the priests depending on the attitude of the individual Parish Priest and the assertiveness of the Sister.¹⁵

I had started a group called “Women’s Space” in my parish where women could come and share their experiences and discuss women’s issues. It became very popular attracting more and more women. The Parish Priest was not happy

13 George Julie SSpS, “Women Living the Legacy of Vatican II: Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India”, in “Women as Equal Disciples, Unfinished Task of The Church”, Eds. Virginia Saldanha, Varghese Theckanath, SG, Julie George, SSpS, published by Streevani Pune, Montfort Social Insititute, Hyderabad, 2016.

14 From responses to my questionnaire.

15 Interview with Sr. Seema SHM.

with the popularity of this group. He then said he could not provide space for the group to meet so we had to shut it down.

Women wish for more leadership roles but do not specify what role.¹⁶ Several Parish Priests discourage women's Cells, which are intended to function in tandem with SCCs. However, some coordinators do help women victims of violence in their quiet way.¹⁷

5. Socio-Theological Implications

Jesus came that all may have life, life in abundance. (John 10:10). Through his life and ministry he healed the sick, fed the hungry, brought sinners to repentance and in general brought life and joy to people's lives. "Women can more easily emulate the priesthood of Jesus because of the qualities of caring, nurturing, sacrificing and inner strength they have been encouraged to cultivate down the ages and which are precisely the qualities that are required for building people and community but which are not encouraged in men brought up in a 'macho' patriarchal society."¹⁸ Sadly, qualities of servanthood attributed to women are seen as complementary to the leadership qualities of men who because of their biology are said to represent Jesus though not necessarily his spirituality of servanthood.

Families in difficulty, like single parent families, senior citizens, young parents, all need the support of the community. With the diminishing influence of the extended family and the increase of nuclear families in modern urban living, the family necessarily depends on the community in the neighbourhood. Women put into practice the core Christian values of love (Jn 13:34–35), caring, sharing (Mt 25:35–36). They follow the example of foot washing that Christ gave his disciples before he sat down to supper. "For I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them" (Jn 13:14–16). Women are the face of Christ in the community. This fact has to be recognized as an important dimension of pastoral work done by women in the community by raising the status of this ministry and recognizing women as partners in ministry towards a Church of equal discipleship. Women actually create support networks and communion in the community. Pope Francis en-

16 From responses to my Questionnaire.

17 From my personal experience of working as Executive Secretary of the Women's Desk of the Archdiocese of Bombay from 1992–2000 and my continued association with the Commission for Women of the Archdiocese of Bombay as advisor.

18 Saldanha Virginia, 'Healing Priesthood – Women's Voices Worldwide' Eds Angela Perkins & Vereena Wright, Published Darton Longman & Todd, 2003, London.

courages the faithful to create welcoming spaces that help people connect and trust each other. He said that if communities are created, close and warm relations will develop so that each person will feel held within a network of solidarity and belonging, this helps in giving people a dignified life, especially those who live in cramped overcrowded spaces. (Laudato Si. #148).

The New Way of Being Church does open up a space for women's leadership in the Church but it is a space that is closely monitored and controlled by the Priest whose mindset is steeped in Indian culture and is seen to be in the place of God, so is greatly revered. This ensures women's subservience. The New vision which talks about a "communion of communities" where "laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers", does take a step towards a Church as the People of God, but it does very little to empower women towards a Church that is a discipleship of equals. Women more easily model the "servant leadership" demonstrated by Jesus while pervasive clericalism is detrimental to the spirituality of servanthood. The patriarchal mindset prevents women from seeing this as a problem so they do not expect servanthood from their religious leaders and are happy to provide the service, making up for this lacunae in the community. They are happy to be servants to the priests as well and often count it as a privilege. The idea of equality in discipleship does not occur to them.

Sr. Pauline Chakalakal dsp, makes a very important point about women's growth prospects in the current framework of leadership by pointing out that "Unless women are alert, this sort of power (nurturing power) can imprison them in their traditional roles of 'obedient wives', 'sacrificing mothers', or 'docile and devoted daughters' of the church. While this stereotyping benefits the male members of the church and society, it may in fact cripple women's intellectual and psycho-spiritual growth."¹⁹

Gendered roles are reinforced and no initiatives are taken to ensure partnership. The fear of change is entrenched in the clergy and subtly passed on to people. "When challenged with the issue of gender equality, the initial reaction is fear of loss which comes whenever the status quo is challenged, the feeling that 'we will lose everything that we believed in'. Following closely is the fear of change which comes when people are conscientised and realise that things have to change which leads to the fear of the unknown 'what will happen next?'"²⁰ As long as clericalism is alive and active in the Church women's subservient status will be reinforced. The big question is, how can it be dismantled? In January 2014, addressing an Italian Congress of Catholic women Pope Francis called for a

19 Dr. Pauline Chakalakal dsp, in "Discipleship, a space for women's leadership?" pg. 282. Pauline Publications, Pauline Sisters Bombay Society, 2004.

20 Hadebe Nontando, in "Gender, Gender Equality and the Church", published on the web at "Ecumenical Women at the United Nations" <https://ecumenicalwomen.org/theology/academic-articles/gender-gender-equality-and-the-church-by-nantando-hadebe/> (08.06.2016).