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AND NATIONAL SOLIDARITY**

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS ADVOCACY FOR GENDER EQUITY

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FOREWORD

The debate on gender equity, like other debates which will shape the fate of community life, is essentially a debate for the future. This is all the more urgent as the ideas exchanged obfuscate more than they clarify the facts and issues at stake to which they refer.

And yet, the issue is only about fighting the unequal recognition of men and women as full citizens, which leads to gender disparities emanating from a social construction likely to frustrate any **Sustainable Development Project**.

Against this background, we cannot anymore talk of a trend, but a contribution to the development of long-term bases for growth, which includes social analysis according to gender, in order to facilitate access to development means and benefits for all, men and women at all levels. This means that the gender approach helps reduce gender inequalities between men and women, with a view to building a fairer and more equitable society.

We could say, with no risk of being contradicted, that there is no possibility to develop a society which excludes de facto 52 percent of its population. But the issue is actually more serious and is more than a simple plea in favour of women, because it is a development issue.

Actually, **since 1974**, general social policy patterns have been gradually losing their relevance, i.e. each society is authorised to build its order of priorities, taking into account its tangible situation, hence the importance to identify the key factors which would help effectively meet the social demand.

Facing such situation, the Government of Senegal, eager to successfully fulfil its mission of creating framework conditions for a sustainable development, must be prepared to clarify the debate on gender equity in order to avoid non-clarified identity withdrawals.

Therefore, it is within this framework and to achieve, among other goals, the (2000-2006) fifth Assistance Programme in conjunction with the **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**, that the Senegalese **Ministry of Family, Social Development and National Solidarity** commissioned a religious advocacy on gender equity.

The Christian advocacy, which is based on the findings of the Bible research by Father Jacques Seck, has clearly, unreservedly, definitely and radically established original, natural and essential equality between men and women.

The general conclusion of his research is that Christianity **absolutely rules out any inequality before God and the Church**.

On his part, Doctor Abdoul Aziz KEBE, who has produced the Muslim advocacy on gender equity, indicates that in legal, economic, political and social areas, Islam fully integrates women, as full partners in the mission of ensuring equity and harmony on earth. Therefore, we must build the universal principles shared by men and women, and take advantage of everybody's specificity.

As a consequence, sexual difference will be a factor to control solidarity and cooperation for the building of a peaceful City.

The result of these positive constructions will enable participants and targets of various programs to better utilize gender analysis in managing and implementing general and sectoral development challenges..

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INTRODUCTION

“There is neither male nor female... in Christ Jesus” Saint Paul told the Galatians (Gal. 3,27-28).

The preliminary question is whether the current meaning of Gender is actually set out in the Bible. The Question is all the more relevant as the Church has been existing for two thousand years now, in addition to the 1850 years between its advent and Abraham.

In this regard, here is what Father Louis Carron, a former professor of dogma, told the Great Seminary in Sebikotane, Senegal :

“Since the International Woman’s Year (1975), the whole world, through statements, addresses and congresses, continue to advocate the promotion of women. In all these stances, there are a number of best wishes for the public and universal recognition of her dignity and rights.

Some think that the Bible itself enshrines an inferiority of women and that Christian revelation has not in the least modified the conception. An unambiguous affirmation which goes against the scriptures and history. In addition, it still seems necessary to describe, even if in guidelines, the authentic clarification of the nature and mission of women in the Bible, p1).

This well poses the issue. Yet before coming to the subject proper, it is worth stating a number of considerations on the Holy Scriptures in general and the Holy Bible in particular.

For Christians, the entire Holy Bible is the word of God. But the word is progressively revealed throughout human history and all the problems of the human heart. Yes, God’s project, his purpose to save entire mankind, is fulfilled in the lives of humans, and therefore he keeps track of it.

The word of God addresses human beings who have their problems, ways of life and cultures. This means that divine inspiration neither covers all the details in the sacred scriptures, nor all the aspects of the lives and words of the prophets and sacred authors. For Christians, the revelation of God’s word is not a dictation. And no literal interpretation should be made of a sentence as : *“And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount **Sinai**, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God”* (Exodus 31, 18).

Similarly, we do not share the view taught by the Talmud that **each word** of the Pentateuch is **verbally inspired**, though we absolutely respect others’ faith and theology.

When being transmitted to persons, the Divine message is influenced by those who have conveyed it. Therefore the word of God and its interpretative theology always consider geography, climate and natural environment, all factors which impact on it.

It was good to state that before coming to our sacred scriptures.

First book of the Bible, Genesis provides a faith-based response to the lives of humans, and the grave problems of human existence in front of death.

This is not a scientific work but theological language. To speak like legal experts and filmmakers, this is an “imagined reconstitution”, of a vision of faith. Hence it is not the story as actually experienced, that being lost forever. In the angle of faith, the writers want to stress that the human condition is both marvellous and miserable, bathed in light and spotted with deep darkness. Therefore God’s intervention is necessary to save mankind (Father L. Carron, in *La Femme dans la Bible* p.8).

This presentation of the human condition is influenced by the era, yet it reveals a message that is always valid and up-to-date, on the mission of men and women in the world.

About the New Testament, the question is whether it has improved the condition of women, compared to its “father”, the Old Testament. The life and teaching of Jesus in the Gospels and the teaching of Saint Paul in his Letters will shed light on that issue.

On its part, the Church, based on Jesus and the Apostles, will bring its modest contribution.

PART ONE : GENDER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Chapter 1 : Valiant women in Israel

Before analysing the major scriptures on Gender in the Bible, let us make a survey of the History of Israel to see the role played by women.

The society of Israel's founding fathers - Abraham and his descendants – is Semitic. Semites are nomad shepherds with a patriarchal society, i.e. the father is the central person in the family, having primacy and authority on the whole tribe.

Polygamy is quite common in this society. Nonetheless, women are real companions, and neither servants nor slaves.

Sarah

Patriarch Abraham kept his wife Sarah, and even remained faithful to her, despite her infertility, a wonderful act in a society where children are the wealth of wealth (Psalms 127,5). Furthermore, it was Sarah who gave him her servant to bear children. And she showed authority on her husband when she dismissed her servant for growing arrogant due to her pregnancy. (Gen. 12,10s ; 16,1 –6).

Rebecca

Like his father Abraham, Isaac has only one wife, Rebecca. She equally has a strong personality. As a matter of fact, her steps brought her husband's blessing on her preferred son, younger Jacob (who later became Israel, after which one of the most famous peoples in the world was named), at the expense of elder Esau, who was supposed to receive paternal benediction.

Furthermore, she was the one who chooses a wife for her son (Gen. 27,6- 17s).

Rachel

Jacob's love for Rachel is legendary as he consented to pay twice the bride price for her hand. In fact, after working for seven years for his father-in-law (this represented the bride price in that community) who manipulated him and took advantage of nighttimes to put him together with his elder daughter, Leah, Jacob accepted to work for another seven years for the hand of his beloved Rachel. This is love. But such love gives the beloved one power over the loving one (Gen. 29,15-30).

Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel have played important roles, but as "Mater and Magistra", Mother and Educator, within the bounds of a housewife's role.

But Miriam, Deborah, Jael, Judith and Esther have played remarkable, if not leading political social roles.

Miriam

After the dry-footed crossing of the Red Sea by the people of Israel, God had just saved from death Miriam, sister of Great prophet and legislator Moses. She organized an immense gathering to praise God. And her hymn has prospered, being performed at each religious service during Jewish and Christian Easters (15,20-21). And the one who reported the event here himself translated the hymn and imprinted an austere tone in it.

Deborah

At the time of the Judges, those inspired men who governed Israel before kingship was instituted, came Deborah, a valiant woman of great courage who led the defence against king Sisera, an enemy of Israel. Deborah (a real **Debbo** as my Haal pulaar cousins would say) herself was the key actor of Sisera's defeat (Judges. 4,4-16).

Jael

Also praiseworthy in addition to Deborah is Jael, another valiant woman who has contributed in the triumph (Judges. 4,17-22).

Judith

Judith is the ideal woman for the people of Israel. She lived when the realm of Israel was declining and split in small realms.

A young, beautiful, but pious widow, she refused to enter a second marriage for faithfulness to her husband. Thus in the second century before Jesus-Christ, a young widow could refuse to enter another marriage. Therefore women with strong personality and knowing what they wanted were free.

Intense praying sourced from the depths of faiths underlay her plans to save her people. She managed to approach the head of the enemy's army, General Holoferne, gain his trust and kill him.

After the triumph, she earned a popular ovation that no woman has ever received in Israel and will undoubtedly not receive evermore :

*"You are the exaltation of Jerusalem,
you are the great glory of Israel,
you are the great rejoicing of our nation :
blessed be you of the Almighty Lord for evermore"* (Judith 15,9s)

*"And there was none that made the children of Israel any more afraid in the days of Judith,
nor a long time after her death."* (Judith 16,25). Is there any better ?

Esther

Long after, while the people of Israel was brought away in Babylon in captivity (current Iraq) when Persian king Assuerus held Babylon in bondage, the Israelites were exposed to a grave threat.

But once again Divine Providence, which is always present in any circumstances, protected and saved Israel through a woman named Esther. She later became the spouse of King Assuerus and averted a conspiracy to exterminate her people (Esther 1-10). It is worth noting that like Judith, Esther was also greatly faithful and pious.

Summary

What is important to pick out of this survey of the role of women in Israel is that, even though men have primacy, the women have played a substantial role which, in many occasions, has been crucial to the salvation of their people, as we have noted in the above.

In any case, "*a so-called smaller than oneself is needed*" (J. De La Fontaine). And to well-born souls, value is independent from gender, as French writer P. Corneille put it.

Chapter 2 : Gender in chapter one of Genesis. Gen.1,1-31.

Scripture on the Creation of Mankind

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ...
And God said “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish
of the sea and the birds of the air
So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
God blessed them
And God saw every thing that he had made and it was very good” (Gen ; 1,1,26-27.31).*

Context and Theological study

Sober and optimistic, this peaceful scripture, which urges contemplation of the work of God - the good work - was born in the sacerdotal quarters of Jerusalem. Coming several centuries after the account of creation, which is studied in chapter three, the scripture contains a brilliant theological study that respects the mystery of how God created Mankind. It confesses that everything is perfect that God makes. This is the least thing that can be said, though we do not understand how evil came in the work of God, this being an impenetrable mystery angels themselves ignore.

The author of this scripture teaches that Mankind was born from the Word, God’s creating word ; that Mankind is both male and female, a dual and twin unity, a diversified couple. The author considers the idea of gemination so evident that in verse 26 he wrote :

“ and let them rule over the fish of the sea.”

Getting to the essential and avoiding mythical language, he simply revealed the wonder of wonders; that Man and Woman were created simultaneous as twins in the **image** of God ! They are equal in nature, origin and dignity.

This implies that they have some kinship with God, that they share his intelligence and conscience, will and freedom, might and love, among others.

It is worth noting that the word **Adama**, the original being created by God, is erroneously referred to as ‘man’, which designates the male in the singular. Now the term ‘Adama’, which refers to dual Mankind, corresponds here to “*o kiin, in serer, neddo, in pulaar, and nit, in Wolof,*” referring to the neutral human being, which is indistinctive of gender. With these words encapsulating both man and woman, the issue about the one coming prior to the other loses its meaning.

And Black African writer Amadou Hampate BA concurs when he quoted the Fulbe initiation tales as saying that our two first parents formed a united single being when they were created. Only later did the environment split the united being in two.

This split of the original being by the environment seems to be confirmed by the language of some peoples about the name and gender of man and woman, for example among the Serer.

Similarly, the Jewish kabala, which inherited ancient Egyptian cosmogony, teaches that the two first emanations created in the universe - *Hokmah* (male wisdom) and *Binah* (female intelligence) were created simultaneously by the breath of the Creator *Keter* (God).

This is to show that man and woman were actually created as **twins**, and therefore are **equal** in **nature** and **essence**, and that the great honour of being in the image of God was equally bestowed on them. And it is also as a couple that they are king of and rule over all the creatures as chanted in Psalms, 8 :

*O LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour
You made him ruler over the works of your hands (Psalms 8,2-8).*

It comes out of the considerations drawn from chapter one of Genesis that the issue relating to Gender equality and equity, the theme of our advocacy, is completely settled.

Summary

The teaching from the first chapter of the first book of creation in the Bible, Genesis, is that the Creator has created man and woman equal, **naturally, essentially** equal in dignity. We should considerer this creation scripture, which does not advantage or disadvantage either of the two, as the unshakable rock the immense benefit of which no later argument, whatever its origin or author, can deprive us of. Let it be therefore the morning star that challenges darkness.

With the plenitude and solidity of this paramount and illuminated scripture, I cannot help the pleasure of quoting Youssou Ndour as saying : “*Bu fi yemoon sax mu neex, neexna ba pare*” , i.e. “If the advocacy ended with this chapter, it would already be sufficient”.

Chapter 3 : Gender in chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis

Scripture - Genesis 2

The Creation of man -male.

*“When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens... no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no **man** to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground- the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

And God said "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name...

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

*"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman '
for she was taken out of man."*

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” (Gen. 2,4-25).

Scripture– Genesis 3

The Fall of Man

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" ...

Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me-she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

*Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."
To the woman he said,
"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children
To Adam he said,
Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life"
And full of decency and delicacy,
"The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." (Gen. 3,1-21).*

Context and theology

"Word of Man, Word of God (translation)"

This is the title of a famous book by French philosopher Roger Garaudy. What does he want to tell us? That man happens to attribute his own thinking to God ; that the word of man happens to be actually mistaken for the word of God.

The author of Saint Peter's second Epistle does not seem to concur with Garaudy when he wrote :

"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1,21).

What is said in this passage is true.

But it is also true that men have slipped in a revealed scripture their personal ideas which end up being part of the sacred scripture. Yes, a cultural issue can find its way in a revealed scripture as in the story of Cain and Abel.

Cain and Abel

These are two brothers, sons of Adam and Eve. Cain is a labourer and Abel is a shepherd. God welcomes the gifts of Abel, but turns away from Cain's. Jealous, the latter kills his brother in the farms.

For whoever sticks to it, this scripture seems innocent. In any case, it defends the good cause of piety. But an experienced reader will quickly figure out that the scripture is biased. The core and cultural problem is the one which pitches farmers and herders since the mist of times. As the drafters of the Bible are of shepherd's decent, the Scripture provides a positive portrayal of their ancestor and sullies those of farmers. We all know the permanent problems between labourers and shepherds.

At first the names given the two brothers are expressive enough. Cain refers to the pagan diviner and priest blamed in the Bible, while Abel means God, his father.

In all the Great Holy Scriptures of Mankind, theologians find such cases, but fortunately in small numbers.

In this regard the author of Apocalypse, who knows that these cases can exist, issues warnings :

“And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Rev. 22,18-19).

And this brings back the account of the creation and fall of Adam and Eve.

The two scriptures are initiatory, symbolic and rather shaped in the literary genre of popular tales. Of course the author of these scriptures is different from that of Genesis 1. The final writer of Genesis has compiled two accounts and preserved their particular features. There is intellectual and moral honesty here.

It is noteworthy that all the literary genres are contained in the Bible, which is a real primeval forest where travellers need a reliable and experimented guide to avoid them loosing their whereabouts.

Coming back to the author of Genesis 2 and 3, we should concede that he is a good storyteller, a thinker and fine psychologist, poet, director, man of faith, messenger of the faith in a world where the life of the couple shifts from the sublime to the tragic. He knows that *“It is not good for man to be alone”*, *“Vae soli”* yes, *“woe unto the lonely”* as the Latin would say. However, it is not always pleasing to live in a couple. There is no earthly paradise, which the author knows.

With him, we know that Adam means the “earthy”, the one who was drawn from the earth, is linked to the earth through his work, and is tied to the earth.

The woman, **Hawa** on her part is the being of life. She was drawn from a living being ; she is the keeper of life ; she is glued to life ; she is a life-giver, even though in pain ; she was created to live with the man.

In other respects, if considered literally, the two scriptures are seemingly indicative of a certain inferiority of woman. In fact,

- She is younger than the man ;
- She was drawn from him ;
- She is his helper ;
- She has received her name from him (and he who gives you a name has some power over you; that is why God has not revealed to any creature its Hidden name) ;
- And worse, she was the one who sinned and pulled man into sin and downfall.

Despite this, man receives her with passion and enthusiasm as his “**alter ego**”, his other self for whom he will leave everything.

When a human being leaves everything for something, it means the latter is highly important to him. And we can affirm without risking a grave error that if it is for a woman that he leaves everything including what he most loves in the world - his parents – then he considers the life the loved one as important as his.

This is due to the fact that the original tie that bonds man and woman is so fundamental, woman’s lure to man so compelling and powerful, that man seems to be snapped up and wrenched away from everything to remake the original dual unity with her.

Hierarchy in the Animal Kingdom

The five advantages that the author of the two Scriptures has attached to the man could mean that : “*Fu ñaar anda, kenna jiitu*” a Wolof saying meaning literally “When two persons walk together, the one goes ahead.”

Thus every community needs a leader. This is a vital and good need.

Furthermore, the sense of hierarchy is observable in almost the entire animal kingdom. Here are two examples; the former is about vultures and the latter about bees.

King Vulture

Vultures have a sense of hierarchy. Through its sobriety, I think their king, a **big male**, is the noblest and most dignified bird. In fact when there is a dead body, it is preceded on the scene by its subjects arriving in the early morning and encircling the body. Its majesty king vulture comes at sunrise and the subjects clear the way to let it through. And it majestically advances toward the body, turning its head left and right until it reaches it. And with its strong beak, it chops off a small bit of the nose, (eye or lip) and another small bit of the haunches. Then it withdraws and flies off.

Then the vulture subjects rush onto the body. I have come across a similar scene several times, but I have never ever seen a greedy king vulture. This is real kingship.

In this respect, I have the reference of a book stating that in ancient Egypt, a pharaoh first served the people before his own house in the event of acute food shortage. Real kingship is here again.

Queen Bee

Bees on their part do not have a king, but a Queen. The latter is nourished and treated to the exquisite food that bees do so well. Her Royal Highness does not work, but what she does in the hive is more important than the others’ work.

She is the only one who lays the hundreds of eggs in the hive ! And until the end of the laying season, she keeps laying, which entitles the queen to the fine food served her.

Therefore if man is the head of woman, this does not in the least mean degradation for her, as this is only consistent with the course of nature and beings.

In any case, “*If the husband is the head, the wife is the heart*”, Pope Pie XI said. Now who will you try to know the best of two equally important organs?

The Trespass

According to Genesis 3, it was the woman who ate and had the man eat the banned fruit. Did the man ignore that the fruit was prohibited? Wasn’t he free to refuse. Did he have the right to **cowardly** accuse his wife. He nearly went as far as accusing God for giving him the woman. Remote is the source of our cowardice.

Before proceeding, let us consider a significant detail. In the two scriptures under consideration, Genesis 2 and 3, Adam has always preceded Eve, except in the grave case about finding the culprit for the disaster. At least this is one time when Adam is not starred

and does not play the lead. And poor Eve, who has always received everything from Adam has only disaster to offer when she comes to give him something. The scapegoat also has a remote origin.

The Divine Message

The question that arises is what the message of this initiatory popular tale refers to. What does it want to tell us.

In sum, we could answer that the core issue is about unity and diversity in the human couple; it is about the **difference** and complementarity of man and woman. The divine message teaches us a truth well disseminated by Father Teilhard de Chardin that the strongest union is also the one which mostly marks the personality of individuals; and this is sexual union.

Yes, what bonds man and woman is both what makes their great difference and complementarity.

This account reveals that what man expects from marriage is less his double or other half than a partner, an opposite to dialogue and share with. And when this partner is found, then humanity is reconstituted, completed; and this is expressed by the heart cry : *"For this time, here is the one meant to complement me"*. The man becomes aware of his true personality, by discovering the femininity of the woman. This is a wondrous revelation.

Communion love

In the final analysis, love is what links man and woman, this lure emerges from the depths of the self, from that vital impulsion of the heart, stronger than filial love, from that personal and reciprocal engagement for which man leaves everything.

From the considerations we have seen in Genesis 2 and 3, as well as Genesis 1, it transpires that the ideal marriage is primarily monogamist, exclusive and permanent.

The author says that without a woman, man is unaccomplished and incomplete, defective and dissatisfied, vulnerable and unhappy.

He neither teaches that man was created before woman, nor that the world was free of problems. He acknowledges that man failed to live up to God's expectations. But for him, the purpose of God is ahead, because God never comes to be discouraged about man.

This initiate also knows that nothing serious or great can be done without paying the full price of suffering. All human initiations on the five continents seek LIFE through altogether fertile suffering. For a man, tilling the earth is productive and vital, but costs much pain. And for a woman, giving life is divine, but is also very painful. For him man and woman have a common destiny, and nothing justifies the idea of inequality between the two in dignity or rights. As for different endowments, far from being a sign of inferiority, they are rather a title of honour and an irreplaceable treasure (Father L. Carron, *La femme dans la Bible*, p. 11).

Summary

What is necessary to retain is that Genesis 2 and 3 also establish equality of nature and essence, origin and dignity between man and woman, but without ignoring their different

endowments and functions in life. Yes, they share love and their mission, but based on the specific qualities of each.

PART TWO : GENDER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Chapter 1 : In the Gospels

If we strictly stick to what we have seen and analysed in the Old Testament, it seems clear that it not preaching in the name of God, even if the language and mentality of those times seemingly admitted a certain inferiority of woman. Does the New Testament, which is for Christians, "the plenitude and summit of revelation...bring a final light to us on so up to date an issue ? What does Christ think of the female condition and what Saint Paul tells us about it ?," Father L Carron queried, (La femme dans la Bible p. 11).

Jesus and Women

In the era of Jesus, the Semitic mentality and the level social evolution among the Jewish society gave women a secondary role. That is why Jesus' teachings and behaviour, attitude and freedom contrast with the trend in his environment. In a number of times, Jesus has shocked even the disciples (John 4,27; Luke 7,35-50).

Parallels in the Gospels

1. Evangelist Saint Luke reports that when the Jesus child was being presented to the Temple forty days after his birth, an old man named Simeon prophesied about him, and an old woman, Anna, also prophesied about him (Luke 2,25 S).
2. Evangelist Saint John also reported a conversation between Jesus and a man called Nicodemus, where Jesus reveals to him that there was a new birth, a spiritual birth (John 3,1s).

He also reported a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, where Jesus reveals to her that true faith, the true worship of God is first and foremost a heart affair, and is lived in the sincerity of the heart and spirit. This is even more important than a pilgrimage though the latter is useful (John 4,1s).

It was to this woman that Jesus revealed his being the Messiah. And it was thanks to this woman that the Samaritans recognized, before everyone, that Jesus was the Saviour. Moreover, this woman belongs to a scorned community; she had had five husbands and was now living with a sixth one. Despite all that, Jesus does not hold her in scorn. In short, Jesus refuses to adopt ethnic or theological prejudices as well as sexual prohibitions. This is freedom!

3. On the Stations of the Cross, a man, Simon of Cyrena, helps Jesus carry his cross (Luke 23,26). Veronica on her part challenges the soldiers and wipes the face of Jesus (according to the Christian tradition).
4. At the foot of the cross where Jesus is nailed, there is Apostle John, but there is also Mary Magdalene (Luke 23,26-27).

Questions about Divorce

Scripture : Mark 10,2-12.

Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'

'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.

*"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman **commits adultery** against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery».* (Luke 10,2-12 et Mt 19,1-9 ; Luke 16,18).

Context and Analysis of the Scripture

“Word of man, Word of God.”

While answering the Pharisees Jesus defends the rights of women. And he even reviewed the law of Moses who, because of the hardness of men's hearts, **adapts** the divine Law to their desire. However, Jesus differs, and urges referral to the two fundamental scriptures.

In any case, for Jesus, if man had the right to repudiate his wife, the wife too would have had the same right; but neither of them does, except in the event of outstanding prostitution.

This equality that Jesus establishes is a real revolution. Assuredly, never a man has spoken like him. (John 7,46) ; he was talking about authority ; and himself said “*You were told, I tell you*” (Luke 1,22 ; Mt 7,28-29 ; Luke 4,32).

The adulterous woman

Scripture – John 8,2-11.

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8,2-12).

Commentary.

Here is the only case where Jesus could not help a woman in distress, by her own fault which was adultery and yet he succeeded - and in a sublime a way - to bail her out against the Law of Moses (thus the Law of God), by referring the woman's indicters to their own conscience and conduct, which were as soiled as that of the accused person.

"Ndekete yoo, Kumba tanewul Degen (Surprisingly, the one turned out not be better than the other, which means that the accusers were not better than the accused person)

Only Jesus, a man full of humanity, filled with the Holy Spirit and Messenger of love and absolute divine mercy could come out safe from this trying time and save the woman, without contradicting the Law of God. Fantastic!

Three women who loved Jesus

Yes, three women particularly loved Jesus and showed it publicly - an anonymous sinner, Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala.

The Anonymous Sinner

A Pharisee named Simon had invited Jesus to eat at his home. Then came a woman of the city, a sinner. She brought perfume. And Standing behind Jesus, she was bathing his feet in tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, covered them with kisses and sprinkled them with perfume.

Seeing that, the Pharisee is scandalized and doubts Jesus' being a prophet as he lets a sinner touch him. And Jesus who reads hearts explains to Simon that though a sinner, the woman has much love. And owing to this love, Jesus told the woman : "*Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you, go in peace*" (Luke 7,36-49).

Jesus' attitude clashes with that of the Pharisee who invited him. The latter has but scorn for the woman. Jesus neither judges nor condemns her. Instead he saves and rehabilitates her, as he is the saviour of sinners, not their judge. This is his mission. Jesus does not sink the head of a drowning person deeper in the water. With him, the saying going as "Where there's life, there's hope" is justified. In short, Jesus never despairs about anyone.

Mary of Bethany

Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, her elder, also loves much Jesus. Out of her profound love for the Lord, she spread on the feet of Jesus an entire bottle of a precious perfume. Then

she wiped the scented feet with her hair. Apostle Judas is scandalized, but Jesus approves and sees in the gesture of Mary an anticipation of his funeral bath (John 12,2-7; Mt. 26,12-13).

Mary of Magdala

Among the women who accompany Jesus and his group, there is a distinguished one, Mary of Magdala. Another Mary who loves Jesus! Rightly so, because Jesus liberated this woman from seven demons which possessed her! And even for less than that, we would all be "fans" of Jesus (Mark 16,9).

It was this healing and the charisma of Jesus that appealed to Mary of Magdala. As she was liberated, she headed the group of women. She herself led the women to see how to deposit the body of Jesus in the tomb and prepare aromatics and perfumes to cover the corpse (Mark 15,47 and 16,1-4).

She is the first one who visits the tomb and the one who dashes to tell Peter and John that the tomb is "empty" (John 20,1-2); she is the one who seeks the body, as she was being tortured by anguish !

And as there is a sort of emulation between her and the Lord. Yes, as each one is trying to give most love. Jesus, who had already cured her, treats her to the grace of graces, the honour of honours, by appearing to her before everyone after his resurrection from the dead!

It is neither Peter, the chief apostle, nor his dear John, but Mary Magdalene, a woman, that Messiah Jesus covered with the distinguished honour of being the first witness of his Resurrection. And that is the fruit of love!

Ah! Love, it underlies human miracles.

With love everything is obtained. Furthermore, everything ends except love, which has a divine essence. God is Love. Now God is eternal, therefore love is eternal.

The first missionary of the Church, the first herald of the Resurrection, which is the foundation, central piece, keystone, core of Christian Faith, is deposited in a woman, a child of Eve. Yes, a woman, whose love and Faith underlies and will underlie forever the Church's dogma of dogmas : **the Resurrection** of Jesus! And the first appearance of Jesus was reserved for a woman! This is fantastic, sublime and divine! And so much worse for misogynists! (Mark 16,9; John 20,11-18).

Healings by Jesus

During his ministry, Jesus has cured many people, including women, men and children. I will cite only four of them - a woman subject to bleeding, a 12 year old girl, a stooped woman and a leper – to highlight his personality.

The woman subject to bleeding

"While he was saying this, a ruler came ...and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak... Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." (Mt 9, 18-22).

The highlight is not the healing, but Jesus' accepting to be touched by a woman suffering from bleeding, who is therefore a pariah and legally impure person for the Jewish religion. However Jesus not only lets himself touch but heals the woman. What's more, he congratulates her for her faith. It had to be done, he did it.

The twelve-year-old girl

When Jesus entered the house of the ruler who had went to fetch him, he took the young girl by the hand, and she rose up (Mt 9,23-26).

This twelve-year-old adolescent too had a problem with blood. Twelve is the age of puberty, when the child grows out of childhood. Yes, she henceforth must take blood into consideration. And she was to die from that. But Jesus has come to restore things, and life will follow its course (its normal cycle).

The Stooped Woman

Now Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, on Sabbath day. And there was woman who was bewitched and deeply crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. Jesus told her : *"Woman, you are set free from your infirmity."* Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God (Luke 13,10-16).

But the ruler of the synagogue was angered by the healing on a Sabbath. *"The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham..."*

The healed leper

A leper approached him, bent on his knees and said, *"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*

Jesus reached out his hand and touched him, then he said "I am willing," "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy" (Mt 8,1-4).

Lepers too were impure and pariahs. Jesus touches, heals them and they recover their place in society.

Summary

Here is the lesson to draw from the life and teachings of Jesus.

For Jesus everybody, either men or women, must be fully engaged in their vocation. According to him, only being faithful to our endowments dedicated to the service of all counts.

Jesus gives any person met on the way the force to go further. He is not disappointed at anything except conceit and hypocrisy. He has come to save and not judge, reject or condemn. Segregation and discrimination against women have no place in his Gospel. This was sufficiently demonstrated in the above considerations.

Chapter 2 : Virgin Mary in the Holy Scriptures

Furthermore, for those who are amazed that Jesus has chosen twelve apostles and without a woman among them, doesn't Mary Magdalene leave all the apostles behind? The essential thing is the total engagement of the heart, which Saint Paul chanted in his first letter to his dear Corinthians; love is the supreme value that dominates all titles (1 Cor. 13,1-13).

In addition, though being an apostle is good, Virgin Mary was not. But who dares compare her merits and actions with those of the apostles? We need not insist, as the filial cult that the church confers on her is sufficiently expressive. Furthermore, the Church awarded her the title of Queen of the Apostles (Litanies of the Virgin). Wasn't the Church reproached with conferring sometimes an excessive cult to Mary? But then who is Mary?

In the Old Testament

After Adam and Eve trespassed the command, God prophesied to the serpent (symbol of Satan) that a woman would burst its head (Gen. 3,15). The woman is Virgin Mary, according to the Church (Apoc. 12,1-17).

Prophet Isaiah announced that a virgin would conceive a child (Isaiah 7,14). According to the Church that virgin is Virgin Mary, (Mt 1,18-23).

In the New Testament

Engaged with Joseph, Mary became pregnant by the action of the Holy Spirit, which confirms the vision of Prophet Isaiah (Mt 1,18-23).

Yes God sent Angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary. The Angel told her : *"Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you...*

you have found favour with God. You will be with child...

The Holy Spirit will come upon you...

Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her (Luke 1,26-38).

A great sign appeared in heaven : a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head; she is fighting Satan with the weapons of humility, charity, hope, mercy (Apoc. 12,1-17). That woman is still Virgin Mary.

In the Apocrypha

Assumption is Virgin Mary's greatest celebration as it marks her elevation to heaven in body and soul. It comes from the apocryphal books, meaning secret, hidden, mystic, which date back from the event in the year 345 after Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia (Western Europe), the conqueror of Asia.

After a long-lasting tradition, the Catholic church in 1950 publicly acknowledged the great honour done to Mary Immaculate.

If the cause of sin is death, Mary being Immaculate (morally unstained), it is easy to understand the privilege given her to anticipate the final Resurrection.

As for the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception, it was in 1854 that the Catholic Church acknowledged it as a dogma, which was confirmed by the Virgin herself in 1858 when she appeared to a humble illiterate young girl named Bernadette Soubirous.

"This way of acting is perfectly consistent with the freedom of the Almighty, which Jesus has acknowledged : "At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure" (Luke 10,21).

1. In Islam.

The Holy Koran previously illustrated the preservation of Virgin Mary from any fault :
"The Angels told her : 'Oh Mariam (Mary), God has chosen you, in truth, He has purified you, He has chosen you among all the women in the universe" (Sour. 3,42).

According to a hadith reported by Al Bukhari, *"the best of women is Mariam"*

According to Ibn Arabi, the perfection of Mary is certified by the Prophet.

Ibn Hanbal reports that Mary is the king of women in paradise.

A hadith says that Satan puts his finger on each human being at birth, except for Mary and her son Jesus.

Yes, Mary is the most honourable among God's servants. She has preserved her chastity and to her God breathed the Word.

Mary is that pure soul God has chosen to receive his Word and whose entrails were purified.

Mary is a woman attached to prayer and meditation, with all her heart dedicated to God ; a pure heart illuminated with divine light. For among His endowments, God has not granted any of his servants this particular grace conferred on Mary of keeping her heart always turned toward the Glory of God.

Yes she is constantly in an attitude of openness to God and glorification of Divine Majesty.

An perfect female model, Mary gathers all the virtues expected in a woman : faith and charity, piety and purity, chastity and sanctity, humility and obedience. That is why the religious creed of the Moustarchidines and Moustarchidates sent me a delegation ahead of their first Constitutive Congress in 1986, to borrow books on Virgin Mary, which I was pleased to do.

Besides, everybody knows that Mary is still privileged not only to have her name quoted several times in the Holy Koran, but also the Holy Book dedicated her a whole sourat. This is sublime, divine. Now is time to say it. That is why after God, Mary is the greatest link between Christians and Muslims.

Devotion to Mary

Owing to the privileges granted Mary by God, Christians early became greatly devoted to her. The cult of Virgin Mary was born with the Church, if not before the Church which came to being in the year 33 after Jesus-Christ on Pentecost.

Oh yes ! the cult of Virgin Mary comes from heaven and begins with the angelic salutation addressed to her by Archangel Gabriel in the Name of the Most High.

In fact : *“God sent the angel Gabriel..., The virgin's name was Mary. Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you...”* (Luke 1,26-31).

Shortly after the honour conferred on Mary by the Messenger of the Most High, a woman, yes a woman filled with the Holy Spirit through Mary's presence at her place - Elisabeth – went into an ecstatic trance (meaning daanu leer in, wolof) and uttered a loud cry : *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear*

... Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished” (Luke 1,41-45).

And, humbly, Mary accepts the honour done to her and celebrates her joy :

*“From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name”* (Luke 1,48-49).

Left behind in devotion to Mary by a woman, Elisabeth, men later made up for the delay. And if the thousands of hymns to the honour of Virgin Mary on the five continents were to be identified, I think like Evangelist Saint John that *“if every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written”* (John 21,25).

Therefore I will content myself with some refrains that are struggling in my memory.

Pope John Paul II said : *“The Church sees Mary as the Highest expression of the female gender”* (Letter of Pope John Paul II to women number 10).

Pope John XXIII on his part wrote : *“Mary, the most beautiful of all the creatures. Long life Mary Immaculate ! The unique, the most beautiful, the holiest, the dearest to God, among the creatures.*

*Oh Mary, Oh Mary, you are so beautiful that, should I not know that **Only God** shall be worshipped, I would worship you.*

Beautiful you are ! But who can say how righteous you are?” (John XXIII's Attentifs à Dieu P. 32).

Before the highly mystic John XXIII, another mystic – a Senegalese Muslim, had praised the Virgin in his *“Poem to Mary”* :

“Felicity unto you, Mary, receptacle of purity.

*Above all virgins you are,
 Above them you are to the Lord God,
 Through you will all humans be happy...
 It is not hidden to the Muslims,
 And to all those who worship the Lord,
 That you are to God beloved,
 Oh ! mother of the pure ! ...
 God has to your eulogy guided me,
 You are the pure steps [to heaven] ...
 You are the very essence of purity,
 And never will I stop thanking you,
 With grace, the Generous, our Lord
 Has embraced all that to you relates,
 And unlimited are the thanks,
 By the greatness of you son...
 I beseech the Lord to upon you extend his grace
 that makes eternal you proximity.
 By the Lord's creating word (kun),
 May the Lord this poem make a pillar that our worship purifies ...
 May upon you rest the Lord's baraka (blessing).
 By your son, God the darkness of his times has dismissed ...
 Accept my gift without exchange, as blessed you are by the Lord
 And may it reach your ancestors" (Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, in Une œuvre,
 Foustu, p. 7).*

And we say : Amin ! Amin !

And I resume with a few refrains :

*"How beautiful you are, how beautiful you are oh Mary,
 for your smile comes to illuminate our faces" (by Frenchman Jean-Pierre
 GAINARD).*

*"Rejoice, filled with grace, cry with joy, Mary, City of God.
 Ah ! How beautiful she is, How beautiful she is" Father DIONE, a Senegalese
 priest in Kaolack).*

*"And the flowers of the roses of bushes, and the lilies of the valleys embraced
 her as on a spring day" (a French priest).*

*"You are the honour, you are the glory of our people, Virgin Mary" (a French
 priest).*

*"Glory unto you, Mary, daughter of Israel, bloomed flower, in the joy of
 heaven,
 Your splendour crowns the work of the Lord, and Jesus bestows you part of his
 felicity.*

We pray you, Full of grace," (a French priest).

*" Queen of angels, patriarchs and prophets, apostles, martyrs,
 confessors, virgins, all saints" (Litanies of Virgin Mary).*

And to end the anthology to Virgin Mary, an anthology initiated by the Messenger of the Most-High and pursued through the generations to our times, here is the hymn of joy dedicated to Mary by the 5th century Christians :

*“Glory and honour unto Mary !
Rejoice, the great morning Star,
Rejoice, the Star that announces the sun,
Rejoice, the crowned with stars,
Rejoice, the clothed with light,
Rejoice, the prelude to the wonders of Christ,
Rejoice, Mother of the lamb and the shepherd,
Rejoice, Mother of the ever bright star,
Rejoice, Shelter of the world,
Rejoice, she who makes radiant the image of Resurrection.
Rejoice, Home to the infinite God,
Rejoice, promise of the new spiritual creation.
Rejoice, she who raises an immense light,
Rejoice, Tabernacle of Divine Grace
Rejoice, Arch clad with gold by the Spirit,
Rejoice, beloved to God,
Share the Glory of the 3 three times Saint
for centuries and centuries.
Amin! Amin!*

PART THREE : GENDER IN THE APOSTOLIC LETTERS

3.a. In the Apostolic Letters

Jesus' "feminism" has shocked many a person, among them some of his disciples. He has even handed women the lion's share, by offering them the final display of his work : making them the first witnesses of his Resurrection.

What about Paul, the main character of the Apostolic Letters ?

Will the disciple be like Master and Model ?

Saint Paul as Apostle

Paul's personality is rich and complex. A Jew versed in Greek culture, he later becomes a Christian, a witness, a preacher, a founder and organizer of Christian communities. As to Corinth, Paul brought to his apostolate the ardour and passion of his faith, the depth of his theological knowledge, the richness of his sensitivity, a firm will, an acute intelligence, a great force of word conviction and chiefly, an unbounded charity.

Apostle Paul has three great intuitions : the universality of God's purpose through Christ, the primacy of the spirit over the law and the freedom of the sons of God.

All things that make him the central character of the budding Church in all areas : apostolic, missionary, pastoral, epistolary, theological. Yes he was by far the first, the best, the most productive and the most complete of all Christian theologians and writers. He is actually in the Church the champion in all categories and the reference in all kinds. This means in the first place that he has already addressed the problem of gender that is under consideration here.

What would have been the Church without this man? Only God knows. But for us believers, chance does not exist and Divine Providence always watches over.

Corinth

Corinth was a large cosmopolite city and one of the biggest ports in the Roman Empire. Located in the Adriatic Sea, it was notorious by its customs.

Paul evangelised it from the years 50 to 52. The two thirds of the population were low-ranking and scorned people.

Before being converted, some of them were debauched, adulterers, pederasts, drunkards etc., according to Paul (1 Cor. 6,12s.); others rejected any clerical organization, thinking that it was enough to have the Spirit.

Passing from Greek Jewish-Christian culture required a certain rupture which was no easy task.

About the Lord's supper, Paul blames the participants who were split in several parties. That is why he intervenes to end the divisions and preserve the cleanness of the Christian worship, which must not adapt to local customs where delirious exaltation was frequent. He aims at safeguarding the unity of the community and create prayer-conducive atmosphere.

It is good to note that if Paul has imposed the veil and silence on women, he did not expel them from assemblies, while he has ordered the excommunication of an incestuous person.

Before denying women talking, Paul told the men for several times against speaking all at once : “*God is not a God of disorder but a God of peace*” (1 Cor. 14,33).

Finally, before the turmoil caused by the “charismatic” movements, they actively participated as anyone in liturgical assemblies without problems.

Paul and women

Like his Lord who is the model that he follows (1 Cor 11,1), Paul is highly considerate of the women in his entourage. In this respect, let us read his letter to the Romans, where he mentions with respect and gratitude his female collaborators such as Julia (Rom.s 16,15), Tryphosa whom he said takes pain in Lord, Phoebe, a deaconess he calls his sister and who protected a number of brothers including himself (Rom. 16,1-2), “*Mary who worked very hard*” for Roman believers (Rom 16,6), Rufus’ mother whom he considers as his own (Rom 16,13) and especially his “*dear friend Persis, another woman who has “worked very hard in the Lord* (Rom. 16,12) . Can such words and feelings come from of a misogynist ?

Finally among all the women who have collaborated with Saint Paul, a special distinction has to be awarded Prisca as well as his wife Aquila “*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them*” (Rom. 16,3-4).

Gender and the teachings of Paul

Also noteworthy is that most of Paul’s letters are responses to specific problems relating to a particular community at a given time. Therefore the priestly directives he gives do not forcibly have a universal value.

Gender and Christendom

According to Apostle Paul, Christendom created a new being and rejected the inequalities established between persons by human societies. Let us listen to him :

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3,26-28).

Here is a total equality in Christendom which gathers us all, men and women to Christ.

Gender and Marital Duties and Rights

Scripture :

“The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”

Here again, there is total equality in the most essential and important thing of marriage and human life – sexual intercourse –, where man and woman become one flesh and the Godly image.

Gender and Divorce

Still about spouses, Paul joins the teaching of Jesus :

“A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.” (1 Cor 7,10-11).

Therefore none of the spouse must divorce. **Equality is again established.**

Gender and mixed marriage

On this subject, Paul gives his personal opinion, while Jesus has not said anything on the matter, for then the Church was yet to exist.

Scripture :

“To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord) : If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife” (1 Cor 7,12-16).

Here again, gender equality between man and woman is established.

A summary before proceeding.

The teachings of Paul on Christendom, marital duties and rights, divorce and mixed marriage are devoid of any detail on any inferiority of woman.

As Paul later taught the Ephesians, the underlying reason of core equality between men and women is in the transfiguration of Christian love through the love of Christ. Christian marriage must be fulfilled in mutual love according to Christ’s love for the Church. In love everything is common and there is no consideration of inequality. Each one totally loves the other as his/her own body the way Christ does for the Church, which also tries to love Christ in the same way. This is a great mystery that dismisses and makes divorce inconceivable (Eph. 5,22-32).

3.b. Gender, Clothing and Behaviour in Liturgical Assemblies

“The husband head of the wife”

(1 Cor. 11,3-16 ; Eph. 5,23 ; Col 3,18 ; 1 Pt 3,1-4 ; 2 Tim 2,9-15) :

Scripture – 1 Cor, 11,3-16

“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head

If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.¹⁰ For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.”

But seeing that has gone a little far, Paul softens his tone :

“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God ... anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice--nor do the churches of God.” (1 Cor. 11,3-16)

Context and commentary

In this outburst against women, it is surprising that Paul does not say it was through woman that sin has come to the world. And what's more, in chapter 15 of this letter, he actually blames the original sin on the one who actually deserves it - Adam, head of the human family and captain of the sunken ship, who has refused to shoulder the responsibility for the disaster. Let us listen to Paul :

“For since death came through a man (Adam), the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man (Christ Jesus). For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” (1 Cor. 15,21-22).

Concurring but more emphatically, Paul writes in his letter to the Romans (the most theological of his letters) :

“...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin...the many died by the trespass of the one man...as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men...through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners” (Rom. 5,12-19).

In this theological oratory where the salvation of mankind is at stake, great Paul, as we know and love him, gains height, elevates the debate and sets correctly the issues at stake :

Whom did the fault come through ? it came through Maam Adama.

And whom did salvation come through ? it came through Jesus-Christ.

But where is Maam Hawa ? she is with Maam Adama, sharing his plight.

And who flanks Jesus nailed on the cross ? Mary Immaculate, collaborator of her son.

With the two couples, Paul has made the necessary adjustments and things have become clear.

There is certainly some irritation in Paul's outburst against the women, but this is found in all the chapters of this letter. He is deeply angered by what is reported to him about this community, which is his beloved daughter. And it is rightly so, as the community is threatened with break-up, which must be absolutely avoided, at the risk of paying the bitter price of saying hard, misleading words.

Man, leader of woman

Man being the leader of woman and the buck being the head of the female in all animal kingdoms because they are biologically stronger is undeniable. There is certainly no community without a leader.

This is required by life and common property. And if the leader has qualities, he is not the best in all fields.

Actually if there was only the problem of the veil, Paul would never have written his letter. The veil was only the last straw that broke the camel's back.

And without an intent to challenge the sacred scripture, we can wonder what the same story would be if told by a woman. Would she not say with a little more verisimilitude that it was man who was derived from woman ?

In any case this theory, as far as we know, could be founded on two important considerations we all know and accept :

1. Theologically, Christians and Muslims affirms that a woman, Virgin Mary, has conceived and born a child without the assistance of man.
2. And biologically, we know that, in the past as well as today, caesareans are conducted only on women.

The word denied

Paul veils and hushes women !

Scripture : 1 Cor 14,26-40

"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. ³⁵If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

³⁶Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ...everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor 14,26-40).

Context and commentary

The Corinthian community, which the Apostle so much cherishes, would always be notorious :
“*everything should be done in a **fitting and orderly way***” Paul ordered.

This means there is disorder and threat to indecency. Paul is not wrong to demand the silence of the women if this is to bring order in the prayer.

Need for silence and for the veil

In our modern society which is harassed and deafened by noises, the necessity for silence in all areas (to relax, meditate, work, unite and unify our lives) need not even be demonstrated. The veil on its part is equally necessary. I mean to say the Moral Veil. Yes, in a the world where moral references have disappeared, where the audio-visual media invade and impose counter-values on us, we die a spiritual death if we fail to **veil our eyes and ears**. Overwhelmed by the environment of violence and sex, whoever in our ailing world does not put **the veil of temperance** over the appetites in our environment will have his soul ruined.

The problem of the veil is actually not a matter of man-woman equality. It is a clothing problem. A cloth is certainly necessary ; it is a ceremony that humanizes and distinguishes mankind from animals. But of course, some clothes seem to be rather reserved for the one or the other sex, without causing any inferiority. Man and woman do not attach the same importance to head and face dress. It is in this perspective that Paul’s outburst should be interpreted. What he demands is good, but his argument is a little hard and **obscure**, as the commentators of the passage noted. Here is an example to better understand. Who would for instance blame a priest for chiding young girls who have turned at mass with “jumbaxs out”(clothes letting out their navels)? Yes, a certain dress is provocative and embarrassing. In short, the salvation of the community was really worth Paul’s reaction.

As for the word denied, it can relate to equality between the man and the woman. Why deny the woman teaching ?

- Because this was not done at that time and they did not have the required training.
- While women did not have an official say in other Christian communities, Paul was the first person to give them such opportunity. But as the try was inconclusive he stopped it, which earned him the description as a misogynist.

« *Ndaxam, wolof Njaay neena, jeem tële aayul, baña jeem mo aay* »,
meaning :

« *Trying unsuccessfully is not bad, but failing to try is* ».

Saint Paul is the most open among the Apostles, even toward women. He deserves eulogy, even by women.

Three Cheers Paul.

PART FOUR : GENDER IN THE CHURCH

Chapter 1 : In the life of the evolving Church

« Mater and Magistra »

What did the Church do of the rich heritage that Jesus first and then Saint Paul have bequeathed on the role of women in society ? Essentially a “Mother and educator” or “a spouse of Christ” in consecrated life, for nearly two thousand years. How and Why ? Because it has adopted the social mode of the societies it has frequented – the Jewish and the Roman societies.

De facto from the advent of the Church, on Pentecost, fifty years after the resurrection of Jesus, to the Council of Jerusalem in the year 50, the first Judaism-originated Christians continued to live as Jews and attended services at synagogues. From the Council of Jerusalem, they abandoned the religious prescriptions in the Law of Moses and began to mark their difference.

From the years 50 to 312, the Church spread in the Roman empire, and there again, Christians lived as the other subjects of the empire. Yet they refrained from idolatry and immorality.

What marks the Christian community is its unity, with each of its members being united to God through Christ and living in communion with the others according to the unity of Christ with his Father and with the Holy Spirit. “See how they love each others”, were said about them (Act. 2,42).

The Family

As regards family life, they have kept the Roman law under which marriage is sealed by mutual consent. And until the 2nd century, there was no liturgical Christian celebration. Yet the spouses asked the bishop to bless them, for they knew they united before Christ. But divorce, polygamy and abortion were unreservedly rejected. Children went to the heathen school, but Christian education was provided at home.

Widows

Having appeared in the Church in the era of Saint Paul, widows were called the “Lord’s altar” for a better understanding of the value of their sacrifice. With prayers, they dedicated themselves to visiting and treating patients.

Deaconesses

In the era of the Apostles, there were deacons (Act. 6,1-6) ; and Saint Paul hailed deaconess Phoebe (Rom 16,1). But it was especially in the 3rd century that deaconesses replaced widows in educating Christian women.

Helen

And a woman named **Helen** rose in the Roman empire and in the Church, and changed the course of world history.

In fact in the year 313, Helen, a Christian woman of great piety and mother of Emperor Constantine, managed (like Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine) to convert her son into Christianity, which ended the persecution imposed on the Church. And the Church led, for better or worse, the public and political life for centuries.

Charlemagne

In the year 800 of the ninth century, Charlemagne was crowned emperor by the Pope. It was him who really opened school.

Women

Where were women from the era of Charlemagne to the 15th century ? They were at home in religious orders. Two exceptional women emerged - **Saint Catherine of Sienna**, an Italian nun who saved the Church from a grave internal split (14th century) and **Saint Theresa of Avila**, a Spanish nun who reorganized religious life in convents (16th) century.

The French Revolution (1789)

With its motto of “**Liberty, Equality, Fraternity**” and its Declaration of Human Rights which has promoted the **Dignity and freedom** of the human person, the French Revolution has changed the course of universal history with its laic and democratic spirit.

There began the emergence of the woman from a system advocating against the values that the Church should never have abandoned – **equality** (Gen. 1,26-27), **fraternity and liberty** (the life of Jesus and the teachings of Paul (Rom. 8,21). As the saying goes, it’s an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

The Council of Vatican II

And a great prophet of modern times – an old man on top of that - Pope John XXIII rose, stirred, and urged the then lethargic Church to read the “the signs of times” and return to its original sources. Meanwhile, Pope John XXIII told the world his love and universal fraternity, as well as the recognition and respect of all that makes the **Other’s** life.

This new language touched a universal nerve.

The dignity of the woman was further strengthened. In this regard, Paul VI, successor of John XXIII, declared **Catherine of Sienna** and **Theresa of Avila Doctors of the Church**, a title which was so far a male preserve (1970).

Here are two other women, also nuns, Mother Anne-Mary Javouhey and Mother Teresa.

Mother Anne-Marie Javouhey was a French nun who arrived in Senegal in the 19th century. She undertook the enterprise to promote the advent of a local (**indigenous** was the word then used) clergy, and educate young Senegalese girls. She did it in so a **bold** and **passionate** a way that the civil and religious authorities, in a language suffering complex, described her as a “**Great Man**”. Saint-Louis and Goree have kept an unfading memory of her magnificent work. A great woman she was.

On her part **Mother Teresa**, an Albanian (Western Europe) nun universally known and loved, began her magnificent action for the poor in Calcutta (India) and later extended it to the five continents. Thus the world across mourned her death and return to God. God is great who knows that the value of a human life lies first in the heart.

What happened was that the Church had stuck to the mentality that it had formerly assumed due to the social cultural conditions of the milieu. Only in the 20th century were intellectual and social equalities established.

In the sun, there is a time for anything as the Holy Bible says. The times were immature, and that was a pity. But better late than never. That is why the Council of Vatican II noticed that “*Where they have not obtained it, women are demanding rights and de facto equality to men.*”

And to the slowness and impedimenta the council noted : “*In truth, it is afflicting to notice that as far as women are concerned the rights of women (in the field of education and culture), are yet be respected in relation to the rights of men*” (Dogmatic Constitution 9).

Once again, better late than never...

And the Church is “*neither a cemetery nor a museum*”, but a garden where each tree has its winters and springs. Let us see to what season the time of Pope John-Paul II corresponds.

Pope John Paul II and Gender

We were surprised at the missionary passion of the pope whose election came as a great surprise. Has he not just ended his hundredth travel across the world ? He is worthy of his name of Paul, in that he has numerous travels at his credit, but also an extraordinarily rich intellectual work. He is also known to be strongly devoted to Virgin Mary to whom he dedicated an **Apostolic Letter** on the Rosary.

Coming to our subject, John Paul II has written two Apostolic Letters; the first is entitled “*Mulieris Dignitatem*”, “*For of the dignity of the woman*” (1988), while the second is “*Letter by Pope John Paul II to Women*” (1995), where the Holy Father dwells particularly on the essential theme of women’s **dignity** and rights, with regards to the light of the Godly Word (part one of the Letter). We will concentrate on this letter, which is welcome to the our point.

The Pope’s Letter is divided in ten points. Therefore we will analyse each of them.

1st Point

The Holy Father most cordially salutes women across the world. The Letter was written as part of the World Women Conference held in 1995 in Beijing (China).

The Church too, he wrote, actually intends to contribute in defending the dignity, role and rights of women by addressing directly the hearts and spirits of all women.

Thank you !

A “thank you” is the starting point of the dialogue the Pope wants to build with women. The Church, through the Pope, thanks God “*for the mystery of the woman*” in relation to her eternal dimension and dignity, for the “wonders” of God which in the history of human generations, have come to fulfilment in and by them (number 31, of *Mulieris Dignitatem*).

2nd Point

The 'thank you' to the Lord for his design on women's vocation and mission addresses all and each particular woman.

Therefore thank you Woman-Mother, woman-spouse, woman-daughter, woman-sister, working woman engaged in social, economic, artistic, political, cultural (a culture that combines the spirit and the heart, reason and feeling).

Thank you the consecrated woman who, following the best woman - Virgin Mary – dedicates her life to serving God and mankind.

Thank you woman for being a woman !

3rd Point

"I know of course that simply saying thank you is not enough. Unfortunately, we are heirs to a history which has conditioned us to a remarkable extent. In every time and place, this conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women. Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity. Certainly it is no easy task to assign the blame for this, considering the many kinds of cultural conditioning which down the centuries have shaped ways of thinking and acting. And if objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry. May this regret be transformed, on the part of the whole Church, into a renewed commitment of fidelity to the Gospel vision. When it comes to setting women free from every kind of exploitation and domination, the Gospel contains an ever relevant message which goes back to the attitude of Jesus Christ himself. Transcending the established norms of his own culture, Jesus treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness. In this way he honoured the dignity which women have always possessed according to God's plan and in his love. As we look to Christ at the end of this Second Millennium, it is natural to ask ourselves : how much of his message has been heard and acted upon?"

And the Holy Father added :

"Yes, it is time to examine the past with courage, to assign responsibility where it is due in a review of the long history of humanity. Women have contributed to that history as much as men and, more often than not, they did so in much more difficult conditions... To this great, immense feminine "tradition" humanity owes a debt which can never be repaid"

(this refers to the field of art).

4th Point

"And what shall we say of the obstacles which in so many parts of the world still keep women from being fully integrated into social, political and economic life? We need only think of how the gift of motherhood is often penalized rather than rewarded, even though humanity owes its very survival to this gift. Certainly, much remains to be done to prevent discrimination against those who have chosen to be wives and mothers. As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area : equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses

with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State.”

What is this about?

The pope answers : *“This is a matter of justice but also of necessity. Women will increasingly play a part in the solution of the serious problems of the future : leisure time, the quality of life, etc.*

... In all these areas a greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable.”

5th Point

Here the Pope mentions sadly the long humiliating history of wrongs done to women, urging us therefore to react.

6th Point

The Holy Father urges international institutions to restore the respect, dignity, and social role of women, who are committed in defending their rights and dignity, all things wanted by the Creator.

7th Point

The Holy Father quotes a meditation in Genesis 1 and 2 - that we have studied - to back his point.

8th Point

The Holy Father stresses that men and women in the world must develop together. This is also a common work.

9th Point

At this point, the Pope rightly notes that human progress is not always visible; that the best progress relating to moral areas is not measurable, adding that in this respect the woman is genial.

10th Point

The Pope wants the Beijing meeting to reflect on female genius which is crowned by Virgin Mary “Queen of the heaven and the earth.”

“Yes Mary is the Queen of Women in Heaven,” according to Ibn Hanbal.

But Mary’s royalty is a service. And who is better destined to serve if not always the woman. That is why the Holy Father wants “the genius of the woman” recognized and closes his Letter with a prayer to Mary-Queen for women :

“May Mary, Queen of love, protect women and their mission to serve humanity, peace, and the spreading of the Kingdom of God.”

And we say : *AMEN ! AMEN !*

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The question is whether the Christian advocacy that we have made can **eradicate** the segregation and discrimination against women in the long history of humanity. In other words, is it possible to draw irrefutable arguments from the Bible to justify an inferiority of the woman ?

We answer no, for the two passages - Genesis 2 and 3 – which are quoted to “inferiorise” the woman do not admit of that if interpreted according to their context, literary genre and era. Those who draw on the two passages interpret them literally. In this case they could also take a picture of God walking in the Garden, strolling in the breeze, or record His voice speaking to Adam and Eve. And if what I am saying is nonsense, picking out a literal meaning of the small advantages given Adam by the passages would be even more devoid of sense.

Furthermore, from a certain perspective, all desired interpretations can be drawn from the Word of God. Not long ago, some people dared say that Blacks were cursed, while others built a segregationist political system, and all that was based on the Bible.

If such persons had been able to slip their theories into the sacred scripture, they would have done so. It is in this perspective that the famous sentence by Roger Garandy should be read :
“Word of man, Word of God”

No believer can deny that God speaks to and inspires the prophets, but exegetes are well aware that the writers and/or messengers of sacred scriptures are sometimes tempted to add or remove some or other thing. This is what the writer of Apocalypse Saint John wanted to avert :

“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book : If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Apoc. 22, 18-19).

Furthermore, thousands of men in the world, ignoring the Bible, have much plighted women ! Therefore, it is not the existence of the two passages that justifies the plights women are forced into.

But then, what has caused that situation ? Who knows ? But might, which is right, plays a great role in it. This saying, which is confirmed even today, should be taken very seriously. There is also the human phenomenon counting here like in other situations : the scapegoat.

Coming back to the advocacy’s references, what conclusions can be drawn without making a theological study of the passages ? Let us proceed by combined results.

1. Genesis 1,26-27.31 and Jesus radically, straightforwardly, unreservedly and definitely established original, natural and essential equality between man and woman.
I am talking about neither bodily nor functional equality. Yes, I have talked of difference and complementary in a dual unity – unity in diversity. There is a total agreement about Genesis 1 and the teaching of Jesus.

2. And then comes Genesis 2 and 3 as well as Saint Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7 ; 11 ;14).

3.

Essentially, on original, natural and essence equality, the author of Genesis 2 and 3 as well as Saint Paul admit it definitely.

But though minor, some details that must not be interpreted literally seem to give man a little advantage. And great Paul, irked by the immoral and heinous things occurring in his dear Corinthian community, uses those minor details and demands that women should be veiled and denied speaking, withdrawing immediately what he had given them, but this was solely aimed at controlling disorder and favouring the solemnity of the Lord's supper, where the salvation of mankind is at stake. There are things that have no place in a place of prayer. Mass is no gala evening. It is in this angle that Paul's strong reaction should be interpreted. He even softens his tone at the end of his outburst.

Therefore it would not be serious to have a strong knowledge of Saint Paul's fourteen letters and describe him as a misogynist. Now one has to be serious. We have no longer anything to demonstrate.

4. On its part the Church followed successively the Jewish and Roman examples where women are essentially "Mater and Magistra (Mother and Educator)" at home. Later, the Church happily saw women not staying at home, but instead embracing consecrated life. And in this vocation, they are not in the least envious of men, as they live in the same, if not a better way.

Yet – and this happens across the world – the Church has delayed in seeing the signs of times and letting the woman into the social intellectual field. But Pope John XXIII (and the Council of the Vatican) as well as Pope John Paul II have apologized to women and brilliantly made the necessary adjustments. Better late than never. We have to make the best start with our closed eyes set upon the Son of Virgin Mary, the eternal friend and Defender of Women.

And let us nevermore forget that Christendom excludes any type of inequality before God and before the Church. This is the thought of the Creator, of Christ, and therefore of Paul.

Father Jacques SECK

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ABBREVIATIONS

Gn.	Genesis
Gal.	Galatians
Cor.	Corinthians
Col.	Colossians
Eph.	Ephesians
Tim.	Timothy
Mt	Mathew
Rom.	Romans
Apoc.	Apocalypse
Judith.	Judith
Exod.	Exodus
Rev.	Revelation

GLOSSARY

Apocryphal : secret, hidden

Apostle : messenger

Apostolic : adjective related to messenger

Babylon : former name of current Iraq

Bible : a compilation of all the Christian books divided in two parts 2 parts :

The 1st part is called Old Testament containing the common books of Jews and Christians ;

The 2nd part is called New Testament and contains the books belonging to Christians : the Gospels and the Apostolic Letters.

Bibliography : the books used by an author as part of his/her work

Canon : Rule

Charisma : Gift; charismatic is the one who is as gifted

Christ : messiah : the one who is anointed with something

Council : a meeting of all Catholic bishops in the world to settle serious problems.

The 1st Council was held in the year 50 after Jesus-Christ,
In Jerusalem.

Church : Assembly or the venue of an assembly

Epistle : letter to a person

Gospel : Good News

Exodus : massive movement ; the book dealing with the moving of the Jews out of Egypt.

Genesis : birth, origin, beginning. The book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible.

Jesus : “God save”

Kabala : A book containing mystics and magic ; it is the hidden knowledge in the Bible and is known to some Jewish initiates.

Moses : Great Jewish prophet ; he freed his people from slavery in Egypt ; he gave the Law of God to Jew.

Misogynist : the one who is unfavourable to women.

Paul : first a great enemy of Christians, then he converted and became the greatest dissemination missionary of the Church.

Peter : he was first named Simeon ; Jesus changed his surname into Peter and made him the head of the Church. He is the first Pope and died in Rome, the capital of the Roman empire.

Pentateuch : five books; the five first books of the Bible

Psalm : Song, religious canticle

Samaritan : here a woman who live in Samaria the third region of Israel

Synagogue : Jewish place of prayer.

Temple : place of worship.

Vatican : a hill in the city of Rome and home to the Pope, successor of Peter and leader of the Catholics