

02.06.2016 **Protestant theological perspective(s) of women's rights** / Rev. Pirjo-Liisa Penttinen

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Dear friends,

My starting point is in Scandinavia: Declaration of peace on women – Sweden 1.10. **1316**, by King Birgir in order to protect the women of Carelia (Finland) while men went hunting or to the war and women were heads of households. Women had right to own land and girls learned to read and write. The keys were hanging on the women's waists. Women of wartimes and creation of democratic society are rooted in our history=herstory.

On June 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 in Finland we celebrated the equal rights: Right to vote, right to be voted (to the parliament). 110 years of equal rights, there we are the World champs. - This means right to be included. Included to the society with full rights.

My current background is YWCA a worldwide strong women's movement, where, inspired by Christian faith, our purpose of the is to develop the leadership and collective power of women and girls to achieve human rights, health, security, freedom, justice and peace for all people.

**For me being a protestant** means maybe more to be **pro test**. To test my skills, visions and commitment in relation of Creation and God, because the gospel, good news invites me to work with God.

**Women in a new job in church-related work** - in boards and committees? By doing so or by attending actively to church boards and commissions we plant and enrich the democratic principles of equality into structures which have forgotten (or not thought about) female interpretation of God's message.

By removing 'man' from the top of the pyramid of creation and instead see creation as the body of God and if we advocate for the mutuality and interdependence of all creation we are heralding a change of direction to the previous exploitative and hierarchical view.

To become a full member of a church, you are to be baptized/christened. You express and confess your faith. You face a **sacrament**, God's gift. Gift for and of inclusion. To become a full member of a Christian NGO you pay your fee(s). You give a gift to the movement. **You can and may be member of many NGOs but only in one church.** You should not be a member in many religious communities.

- **Communion** with God is the goal of the Christian life. The Bible speaks of heaven, where faith will be changed into sight. Every baptized Christian is invited to the feast in heaven. There we shall see God. Eternal life is a secret, of which little can be known.  
**Q: What breaks our communion today? Do we dare to speak about eternity?**
- **Prayer** is the heartbeat of religion. Many parents, grandparents or godparents still teach children to pray with words that may have been passed in the family for generations.  
**Q: Are we praying with or for someone?**
- **Many spiritual songs and hymns** nurture the faith of people who sing or hear them, and these songs provide expression for people's needs and thankfulness before God.  
**Q: The language of our hymns? How do we express ourselves and God?** Is our language is inclusive? We are using (and trying to use) female-including gender-sensitive words, not violent nor war-related expressions.
- **The church building** is bound to its time and materials, but it strives after the eternal, the unity of Christendom, light, joy, and beauty.  
**Q: Is it a safe space, discrimination free zone?**

- **Christian hope** is hope for the future. We hope that God guides our lives. Christian hope also opens up a view to eternity. God so loved the world that He gave His Son as a ransom for the sins of all people. The love of God, which can be seen in Christ, touches us through the work of the Holy Spirit, especially when we read the Bible. Sometimes we may experience God's love in the words of another person. The Creator sent His Son Jesus to tell, through the work of the Holy Spirit, about His love towards all people. It is His wish that, when people hear the call of the Holy Spirit, they could again have Communion with God, ransomed by Jesus Christ.

*Churches and (the leadership of) women?*

Some of us have vocation/call to preach. Some have vocation to leadership. Many female church leaders have NGO background - as well as many female politicians.

**The skills of the best shepherd?** The elders? Mothers? Duty to take care of all the flock - all people created by and redeemed? The leader of the church does not simply work for a special program or movement – that person is for the whole flock. Keep watching over yourselves ... ? Holy Spirit has made you overseer.

>< Democratic – what do we mean by democratic church structures? Inclusion?

Church is God's own but does not brush aside human responsibility. In the life of a church all decisions must be characterized by awareness that we work in community belonging to God. We are not lords over one another, we do not own the church. Our role is to serve. Serve by love but not to serve by domination. Not to be humbled to serve. God's work, our hands, is one of the Lutheran (LWF) slogans.

Faith, hope, and love belong to the life of a Christian. We can be convinced of God's love through believing that Jesus died for us. Hope opens up new horizons even when we experience distress. Love is God's gift to us. We experience God's love and goodness every day of our lives. To be loved and to show love to other people is the calling of a Christian.

The big question of SIN – is it a deed? dress? earrings? lipstick? The traditional society looks for ways to dominate - where is freedom ?

ALL members of the church have their own spiritual gifts and their own talents. Everyone. We may be happy, brave and joyful. This is God's world and gift.

**What are of means of involving the grassroots both in planning and implementing processes and actions?**

How to turn the macro ideas into practices at the local level or vice versa? Improving the conditions of local people does not mean meeting their needs only, but fulfilling their rights. This has been a core value in women's NGOs. Human rights apply for church members as well. Demands of women, like freedom from repressive traditional codes of behavior and freedom from domestic violence and overall violence against women are basic civil and political rights. There are also social, economic and sexual rights.

Only where needs meet rights the policy making efforts take stand. Identifying needs, implementing rights – there is the role to play for YWCAs' advocacy and action. YWCAs can challenge and remind churches in this.

Churches may learn from us and our ways of action and respect. And we in YWCAs may act together with the churches and religious communities to respect and gain spiritual empowerment and healing.

- Are you interested in living with integrity and faithfulness, exploring Christianity at large, justice and social change?

If you are not sure how your flavor of Christianity relates to Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Catholics, Orthodox and so many others, just attend an ecumenical workshop or training session or discussion so that you could hear and share more. How does your interpretation of Christianity differ from the other denominations? The ecumenical way of work is about recognizing that the body of Christ is bigger than any one denomination. It's about sharing our faith with one another across our lines of difference, and about learning from one another new ways to follow God. Be positive = pro for testing the tradition and practice.

Our ecumenical understanding and education comes not from the curriculum but from fellow people. We learn more as we discuss theology, church history, creeds, and liturgy from our varying perspectives and traditions and see it through the eyes of involvement.

If our worship explores how God changes communities, the spiritual vision drives us to create change. It will examine different images of God and how there can be a forum for different views and theologies. Women are very creative when drafting the message or sharing the good news of Gospel or praising the faithfulness of God in Old Testament. We do not stand still but we express ourselves with **the whole body**.

Can we live out our inspiration and faith, every day?

\*\*\*\* (not used example of an inclusive prayer: )

For Such Women We Say Thank You by Rosalie Sugrue, Raumati, New Zealand 2013

Earth Mother, Sky Father, Creator and Sustainer of us all, we acknowledge you as The One who prompts us to reflect.

Today we reflect on your goodness experienced through womankind. We remember before you women who have touched our lives

For such women we say Thank You

We bring names from the past into conscious memory.

From the web of women that glisten in our family tree we silently name - mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins and others we claim as family...

Whether they live in this world or the next we know all are known to you...

God bless our kinswomen

From the tapestry of significant women who have enhanced our lives. We silently name: teachers, preachers, leaders, mentors and friends... We give thanks for the rich fabric woven by poets, authors, artists, actors, dancers, musicians, craftswomen and all who inspire and influence.

God bless inspirational women

For the hidden skeleton of women who work to change attitudes and laws in the cause of justice we give thanks.

We remember those who facilitate behind the scenes, and those who work at the raw edge of human need...

God bless caring women

We have been enriched by encountering women who persevere, endure, nurture and support; Women of patience, prayer and charisma; Passionate women, practical women, and fun folk...

God Bless nurturing women

From the intuitive nature of woman comes an urge for peace. We give thanks for this gift and celebrate its application be it with sibling toddlers, fractious friends or paying clients, be it by swift action, or hard wrought in boardrooms and chambers;  
God bless peace-active women

From the sparkling spread of history-makers, women we have never met but whose names and deeds are notched in our memories as heroes and role-models. We bring names and recall deeds and marvel...  
God bless special women

For the vast network of workers who keep society functioning: businesswomen, home-makers, lawyers, vets, assistants, doctors, nurses, tradeswomen, seasonal workers, waitresses, factory workers, ....., presbyters, receptionists, cleaners, clerks, carers, politicians, CEOs and volunteers ...  
God bless working women

For the myriad of unremarkable women:  
Struggling women, suffering women, and ourselves we pray...  
Strengthen our sisterhood as together we work for a better world;  
Show us how to become more like the woman we admire.  
God bless ordinary women

Enable us to claim the best in feminist values and feminine wisdom;  
Help us reveal the Spiritual within the Material, and the Sacred within the Secular.  
With strong threads from the past and rays of bright hope for the future,  
Help us weave a faith suitable for today – a mantle worthy of tomorrow's daughters.  
God bless us all. Amen