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Integrity and Justice at Stake: Confessing and embodying unity – A feminist theological perspective¹

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the question of the church's integrity and justice towards women from a feminist theological perspective. In light of the history of the Confession of Belhar, the article also explores the possibility of the proclamation of a *status confessionis* on gender issues in the church, as well as possible reasons why this has happened in the case of apartheid and not regarding the oppression of and discrimination against women. The article then draws attention to the state of women in society and church in a comparative global overview thereof, and challenges existing bias against women in churches regarding their dogma and praxis with reference to the thought of post-Christian feminist theologian Daphne Hampson. Finally, reference is again made to the Confession of Belhar and the contributions it, and a church that strives to embody it, can make in the struggle for women's equality and thus to the embodiment of Christian unity, also between the sexes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Thank you for letting me share in fellowship with you during the days of this conference. I bring greetings from my church The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden and also its youth movement SMU. During the days of the struggle against apartheid the SMU played an important role together with other NGOs in the Swedish *Isolate South Africa Campaign*, as did the church in its support of change in South Africa via the ecumenical movement in Sweden and internationally. Through this involvement links and friendships were formed between my church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). However, in approaching today's theme I do it in my capacity as researcher in ethics, particularly feminist² ethics and theology.

1 Paper read at the Barmen/Belhar Consultation at Stellenbosch, 20 October 2004.

2 When using the term "feminist" I do so with an awareness of the critique directed since the beginning of the 1980's by African-American women against a "white feminism", not the least in its understanding of oppression. I would like to state, with many others, that in oppression against women race, class, ethnicity, age, and sexuality intersect with oppression because of gender in complex patterns. I discuss these and related questions in Sporre, K., *Först när vi får ansikten – ett flerkulturellt samtal om feminism, etik och teologi*, (Lund Studies in Ethics and Theology, 9. Atlas Akademi, Stockholm, 1999, p 55-103). Thus, the feminism I opt for is aware of the intersectional nature of oppression as well as of the fact that sometimes men are oppressed, however hardly ever because of their gender, and if so, not as part of a

I know that the one overriding issue of unity on your minds and in your hearts at present is the one of a possible unification between the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and URCSA and the role of the Belhar confession in that process. I know and acknowledge the importance and urgency of these questions, not in the least since I know from the discussions held within the executive committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), where I served as a member between 1989-1997, how complex these issues have been and how much attention, human efforts, frustration, despair, and hope have been linked to it. In WARC we continuously monitored and evaluated the situation to see whether the suspended membership of DRC could be changed to full membership.³

Here I will, however, address another issue of unity where I deem questions of integrity and wholeness for the church seriously to be at stake. This I will do by focusing on the situations of women, in and outside of the church, as well as by reflecting on the work by one particular feminist theologian and from that I will articulate a challenge. The title of my contribution is *Integrity and Justice at Stake. Confessing and Embodying Unity – A Feminist Theological Perspective*. This article I also include a comment made to me by Rev. Pieter Grove when I presented this paper. My response to that comment and further reflection on it will conclude this article.⁴

2. AT RISK: THE INTEGRITY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Having read and reflected on the confessions of Barmen and Belhar, there is one obvious feature that immediately strikes one as something they obviously have in common. They are expressions of the Christian faith at moments in history when a certain urgency was felt, when there was something in the human condition, in the relationships between human beings and the way they are understood in a particular society⁵, that called for serious attention from Christians – a clear stand was asked for, otherwise the integrity of the Christian faith will be compromised, i.e. the heart of faith was at danger and ran the risk of being lost. This is what the confessions of Barmen and Belhar first and foremost bring to me as a reader. I would like to link this observation with a question a Swedish colleague of mine posed to me in the beginning of the 1990s.

2.1 A question

In a discussion at the Theological seminary of my church, nowadays called the Stockholm School of Theology at which I and my, then, colleague, Dr Lennart Molin, both taught, he posed a

systemic oppression. Further “my” feminism strives for equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities for women and men, with the clear awareness that women are discriminated against, most often within their respective groups.

- 3 The membership of the DRC was suspended in 1982 because of its teaching and practice in support of apartheid. The General Council of WARC declared apartheid and the moral and theological justification thereof a matter of *status confessionis*, i.e. a matter where churches could not differ in their teaching and practice without the common confession being seriously jeopardized. Apartheid was declared a sin and the moral and theological justification thereof “a travesty of the Gospel, and in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy”. See “Resolution on Racism and South Africa”, Appendix 15, in *Ottawa, 1982*, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 21st General Council. In 1998 the DRC was readmitted into full membership of WARC.
- 4 I would like to express my gratitude to Rev. Grove for his question and also to Rev. Anna Karin Hammar who commented on the draft of this paper. Thank you also to Dr. Lennart Molin for posing me a question that has long concerned me.
- 5 Germany 1934 and South Africa 1986.

question to me that I could not really respond to. I have kept coming back to this question, now and then reflecting on it. And I am still not sure about the answer.

Dr Molin and I might have been discussing the issue of the theological and ecumenical discussions leading to and following the proclamation that apartheid constituted a *status confessionis*.⁶ Maybe we were trying to evaluate how these processes could have contributed towards the downfall of apartheid. My colleague then posed the question that still has not left me: “How does it come, do you think, that *status confessionis* has not been proclaimed to address the oppression of women, inside and outside of churches? Why is it so, why has that not become the case?”

I was hit by his question. It was as if the ground was swept away under my feet. What if that had been the case? What if churches had declared it to be a matter of *status confessionis* - the oppression women suffer in churches but also elsewhere in societies? What if churches had declared it to be a question on which the integrity of common confession of the churches was at stake, if not oppression and discrimination against women was addressed as sinful and fought accordingly? I was challenged by my colleague’s radical position and deep solidarity with women - there was I the supposed-to-be-feminist, and here he came up with such a demanding and provocative suggestion. It was as if my mind swirled, as if it was lifted beyond the ordinary, as if his question had a deep prophetic foundation. It took my imagination beyond what I could have thought, towards what I dream of – a world, a reality where women are treated as equals, where they do not suffer oppression as women, where their or our oppression is not more severe than that of men, and added to oppression, the fact of class, skin-colour, age, ethnicity, sexuality or the fact of being disabled. What if we had a world without oppression, or with less oppression, or at least if we had a world where churches stood firm by the side of women and were crystal clear on denouncing oppression and discrimination because of gender?

My colleague’s question had two entries, a how-question and a why-question. I recall struggling to answer the second part of his question – the “why question”, as the question was so openly and thoughtfully formulated. The powerful and consistent role of the ecumenical movement in support of the *status confessionis* discussion was brought to mind, along with the use of the international labour movement and other NGOs in the struggle against apartheid. I noted what seemed to be a forceful organizational capacity as well as the theological and political ideological work to consistently fight apartheid. I could then not see anything similar, likely to support a possible struggle against the oppression of women, worldwide. Women did not seemingly have access to this kind of power and/or allies in solidarity with access to the organisational power.

6 As already referred to (footnote no. 2) the General Council of the WARC took such a decision in Ottawa 1982. After initially having stated that “God in Jesus Christ has affirmed human dignity” and through his life and death reconciled people to God and themselves, the resolution critiques the apartheid policy and its theological and moral justification and states that it is in direct contradiction to God’s promises for his world and his church. The resolution further states: “Therefore, the General Council declares that this situation constitutes a *status confessionis* for our churches, which means that we regard this as an issue on which it is not possible to differ without seriously jeopardizing the integrity of our common confession as Reformed churches.”, see “Resolution on Racism and South Africa”, Appendix 15, in *Ottawa, 1982*. For further discussion on *Status confessionis* within WARC, see also *Common Testimony of Faith*, WARC, 1989, pp 38-42 and *Farewell to Apartheid. Church Relations in South Africa*, Blue Series 25, WARC, Geneva 1994.

3. SITUATIONS OF WOMEN WORLDWIDE

What then is the situation of women worldwide? The obvious answer is of course that it varies enormously. For instance, the lives of women in Sweden, my home country, are in many aspects very different from those of women in Pakistan. The life of a well-educated woman in any country in the world varies greatly from the life of an illiterate woman in that same country. The lives of white women are often better than those of women of colour, as status, authority, privileges and recognition often go with the colour of the skin. However you can also find poverty and vulnerability among white women - also in my country.

If you choose to approach the situations of women statistically as you can for instance do so through the United Nation's publication *The World's Women 1995. Trends and Statistics*⁷ you can find figures that give us certain indicators. In summarizing the conditions of women around the world regionally the following is said:

Concerning Latin America and the Caribbean:

- Fertility has declined significantly - dropping 40 per cent or more over the past two decades in 13 of the region's 33 countries. The total fertility rate has fallen from 4,8 to 3,2 per cent. However, adolescent fertility remains high - 13 per cent of all births are to mothers below age 20. In Central America, 18 per cent are below this age.
- Maternal mortality has declined in most countries of Latin America but the incidence of unsafe abortion in South America is the highest in the world.
- Latin America and the Caribbean are as urbanized as the developed regions, with 74 per cent of the population in urban areas. But the rate of growth is much higher - 2,5 per cent a year compared with 0,9 percent - which strains housing, water and sanitation and other forms of infrastructure.

On the situation of women and men in Africa south of Sahara:

- Minimal progress can be seen regarding basic social and economic indicators. Health and education gains have faltered in the face of economic crises and civil strife. Literacy remains the lowest in the world, 43 per cent of adult women and 67 per cent of adult men being literate, and the difference between women's and men's literacy rates is the highest in the world.
- Fertility also is the highest in the world at about six children per woman.
- Estimated HIV infection rates continue to soar, and unlike in any other region, the percentage of women infected with HIV is estimated to be as high if not higher than the percentage of men. In Uganda and in Zambia the life expectancy of both women and men has already declined because of the disease and eight other countries are beginning to see similar effects.

About the situation in North Africa and West Asia:

- In the past two decades, many countries in the region have invested in girls' education - bringing the primary-secondary enrolment ratio for girls' to 67 in northern Africa (from 50 in 1970) and 84 in western Asia, and raising women's literacy to 44 per cent in the region. But, women's illiteracy in northern Africa remains high, and girls' enrolment still lags behind boys'.

7 United Nations, *The World's Women 1995. Trends and Statistics*. United Nations. Social Statistics and Indicators, Series K, Nr 12, New York, 1995.

- Women are entering the labour force in increasing numbers - up from 8 per cent in 1970 to 21 in 1990 in northern Africa and from 22 to 30 per cent in western Asia. Still, these numbers are the lowest in the world. Also low is women's share of decision-making positions in government and business.
- Marriage among girls aged 15-19 has declined significantly in northern Africa and to a lesser degree in western Asia - from 38 per cent to 10 per cent in northern Africa and from 24 to 17 percent in western Asia. Teenage fertility, however, remains fairly high.

On life expectancy and other factors in South Asia:

- Many health and education indicators remain low. Although it has risen by 10 years in the past two decades, life expectancy remains lower in southern Asia than in any other region but sub-Saharan Africa - 58 for both women and men. Equal life expectancies are also exceptional - in all other regions, women have an advantage of several years.
- One in 35 women dies of pregnancy-related complications. Maternal mortality has declined but still remains high.
- Nearly two thirds of adult women are illiterate - and the percentage of girls enrolled in primary and secondary levels of schooling is far below all other regions except sub-Saharan Africa.
- Women continue to marry early - 41 per cent of girls aged 15 - 19 are already married - and adolescent fertility remains high.

About the situation in East- and South East Asia:

- Literacy is nearly universal in most countries for men but not for women. However, girls and boys now have nearly equal access to primary and secondary education.
- Eastern Asia reports the largest average decline in fertility, from 4.7 to 2.3, and its contraceptive use now exceeds that of developed regions. Fertility has also declined in southeastern Asia, but is still generally higher than in eastern Asia.
- Women's participation in the labour force is as high as in developed regions - approximately 55 per cent.

And in the regions of Eastern and Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada and USA the situation is described in the following way:

- Basic health and education indicators generally indicate high levels of wellbeing but in Eastern Europe some show signs of deterioration. Currently, women in 13 countries have a life expectancy of 80 years or more and 11 more countries are expected to reach that level after the year 2000. The life expectancy of men has increased little during the past two decades in Eastern Europe, however, partly due to a rise in death rates for middle-aged men. Women's life expectancy in Eastern Europe has increased much less than in other regions.
- Traditional family structure and size are changing. People are marrying later or not at all, and marriages are less stable. Remarriage rates have dropped - especially for women - and single parent families now make up 10 - 25 per cent of all families. The population is ageing and becoming increasingly female as it does.
- Women continue to earn less than men - in manufacturing the average wage of women is three quarters that of men's. And women and men tend to work in different jobs - women in clerical, sales and service, and men in production and transport. Men also commonly do work which is accorded higher pay and status. For example, the majority of school administrators are men while most teachers

are women, and the majority of hospital consultants are men while most nurses are women.

- Women work longer hours than men in the majority of these countries - at least 2 hours longer than men do in 13 out of 21 countries studied. Women do much of the unpaid work - for example, women contribute roughly three quarters of total childcare at home.⁸

In an overview like the present it becomes obvious that women are not keeping up with men. Women and girls do not have the same access to education, nor do they get the same salary for the same job, and the job sectors where women are a majority are less valued than those of men. Further, what could really objectively be regarded as something very important for human life, namely women's life-giving capacity in giving birth, creates problems. It contributes to women's mortality, contraceptives are not always available or allowed to be used, and some women marry very young and give birth to many children. Women are high in numbers of those infected with HIV.⁹ They also to a large extent run families on their own, and when problems with water, sanitation and housing exist, of course, women and children are vulnerable. What then, about women in the church?

4. WOMEN AND THE CHURCH

As a theologian I have studied and worked with texts by women theologians from different global contexts, mainly within the Christian tradition.¹⁰ For my argument here, however, I would like to introduce the thinking of a British, post-Christian feminist theologian, Daphne Hampson. In an article *On Being All of a Piece/At Peace*¹¹, she has made a claim that she regards as most reasonable, on a religion one would like to consider one's own. She develops her discussion around the three concepts equality, autonomy and truth, and summarizes them in the concept integrity. She links the three with her own experiences; briefly stated, for her to experience integrity and wholeness when she meets a religion, the concerns for equality, autonomy and truth are of utmost importance for her to be in one piece and at peace.

8 For the quotes above, see United Nations 1995, p xviif. To reduce the format somewhat one or two aspects per region have been omitted. The choice of aspects has been made so as to point to the differences between the conditions of women's lives present in this statistical publication.

9 More updated statistics stress this issue even further. Within Sub-Saharan Africa: "African women are considerably more likely - at least 1.2 times - to be infected with HIV than men. Among young people aged 15-24, this ratio is the highest: young women are 2.5 times more likely to be infected than young men". UNAIDS, <http://www.unaids.org/Unaids/EN/Geographical+area/By+Region/Sub-Saharan+Africa.asp>, 2004-11-11. See also Denise Ackermann, "Seeing HIV and AIDS as a gendered pandemic", in *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif*, (Dutch Reformed Theological Journal), Vol 45, No.2, Supplement, 2004, pp 214-220 and also Denise Ackermann, "'A Gendered Pandemic?' HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Problems and Possibilities for Feminist Ethics.", in Grenholm, C-H & Kamergrauzis, N., *Feminist Ethics: Perspectives, Problems and Possibilities*, Uppsala Studies in Social Ethics, ISSN 0346-6507:29, Uppsala, 2003, pp 119-143. In the latter article the pandemic is discussed as a suffering for the church worldwide, the church being the body of Christ.

10 See Sporre 1999 and Sporre, K. "Images of Motherhood: Conflicts and Creative New Thinking Within and Outside the Christian Tradition", in *Jenda, A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 2003, Issue 4, (<http://www.jendajournal.com/jenda/issue4/sporre.html>).

11 Hampson, Daphne, "On Being All of a Piece/At Peace", in *Women's Voices. Essays in Contemporary Feminist Theology*, ed. Teresa Elwes, Marshall Pickering, London, 1992. The text builds on a lecture held 1990. For a more encompassing work by Hampson see, *Theology and Feminism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990. Hampson has chosen to leave the Christian faith and describes herself as a post-Christian feminist theologian, without Christianity but with a remaining spirituality.

In my dealing with her article I will focus on her discussion of equality.¹² After having formulated equality as a prescriptive norm, something to be expected to be at work within a particular religion, Hampson analyses whether women and men are equally represented in the dogma and praxis of Christian faith. She then finds that on the symbolic level (i.e. how the divine is expressed), in the holy texts, and in the praxis within churches, what is regarded male and connected with men is what counts and is valued, whereas what has to do with women and is regarded as female, is valued less and not used, for instance in expressing the divine. Hampson's argument is that a woman cannot, without losing her own integrity, remain within a religion that devalues one as a person by putting one's gender aside as not equally valid when speaking of the divine, and that discriminates against one's gender when organising its practice and leadership by not ordaining to all ministries or in not opening up in equal numbers for women in ministry. Her argument is then further developed around the concepts of autonomy and truth, which I however leave out here.¹³

Hampson's argument intrigues me and I am not sure of the answer to the question whether one can, whether women, and I would like to include men, can remain within the church with integrity when a practice of devaluing women in dogma, in interpretations of the Bible, in liturgy and leadership continues? Can one be, in Hampson's words, all in one piece, can one be at peace, when the above is taking place? Is it possible to worship in a church, in which this inequality remains and is repeated liturgically and otherwise over and over again? Can one accept a practice of leadership locally, nationally and internationally where women are not equally present with men? Can one accept a church that allows itself be bound by millennia old texts from patriarchal cultures and where the existing hermeneutics do not forcefully challenge the patriarchal bias against women? And, in extending Hampson's question, I would like to ask if something is at stake here - not only the integrity of the individual believer but does not the integrity of the church also run the risk of being compromised? Is the witness of the church running the risk of seriously being doubted through its own practice?¹⁴

Hampson's argument has troubled me since I first encountered it. There is a sincerity in her way of posing the questions that does not escape me. Neither can I evade the honesty in Dr Lennart Molin's question. Added to these are the statistics that show that women are not treated well worldwide. One would wish that churches and church people were better informed, but we know far too well that this is not true. Wives of ministers, other leaders or members, are not always treated with respect. They, as well as other women, run the risk of being beaten, violated physically, sexually and mentally and expected to subordinate themselves – and interpretations of the Christian faith are used to support this subordination. Women still remain unseen, are put behind, and are not considered for positions of leadership in churches and faculties of theology, even though exceptions occur. Words of clarity are not spoken when women or girls would have needed support in church and the wider society.¹⁵

12 Hampson, 1992, pp 132-137.

13 A Swedish colleague of mine Ninna Edgardh Beckman has worked more extensively with Hampson's critique of Christianity which Edgardh in her turn critically discusses, see Edgardh Beckman, Ninna, *Feminism och liturgi – en ecklesiologisk studie*, Uppsala universitet, Uppsala, 2001.

14 The questions are not new. See for instance Beverly Wildung Harrison's text "Keeping Faith in a Sexist Church. Not for Women Only", in *Making the Connections*, Harrison, B. W., C. Robb (ed.), Beacon Press, Boston, 1985, pp 206-234.

15 Studies supporting these claims within a Scandinavian context include those of: Lundgren, Eva, *Gud och alla andra karlar. En bok om kvinnomisshandlare*, Natur och Kultur, Stockholm, 1992, and Lande,

5. THE CONFESSION OF BELHAR AND THE CHALLENGE TODAY – TO CONFESS AND EMBODY UNITY

Some of you in the URCSA have trusted me as a sister in solidarity and friendship. You have shared your experiences of the struggle against apartheid and your insights, theological and other, thereof. When I read the Belhar Confession I also sense some of the basic principles your witness has communicated to me. In my encounters, not only with you, but also with other South Africans, Christians as well as people from other faiths, I have been struck by the powerful will to be an inclusive community and to reconciliation that you express. The *spiritual* power of the will to community and reconciliation has spoken strongly to me.

I would like to challenge you now, to build on, to not stop with the dismantling of apartheid, but to go on, to go deeper, and to address the issues of gender inequality within the Christian tradition. Among the assets that you have here in South Africa is the knowledge of how to struggle and how to identify oppression. But not only that, you also know how to address oppression theologically, how to oppose it politically, and how to mobilise – with an underlying spirituality of justice and reconciliation. Justice cannot be left out, nor the will to reconciliation.

You know that where inequality exists relationships lack integrity, and unity cannot be attained. But you also know that the reverse could be true, that when we work towards equality, towards an inclusiveness based on justice, then we regain integrity and approach a wholeness, a unity which is more solidly founded than what might have seemed to be a unity – without justice.

Struggling with the issues of gender oppression is very painful, because it goes right to the core of who we are, how we organise our daily lives, and how we organise our lives in congregations and in church life in other respects, such as at theological seminaries and faculties, and in society at large, as well as in national and international governing bodies. It is an enormous issue. But I carry the deep suspicion that, linked to these issues are questions of integrity for all of us, individually, but also communally as churches. And the issues need to be approached globally; they are as South African, as they are Swedish, Swiss or South Korean.

Added to the resources you as South Africans particularly have is a constitution, which I know many of you self-critically express as being hard to live up to and which could be improved. However, there is, as I see it, an enormous asset in that it so solidly speaks of human dignity – the dignity of each and every human being. Such an understanding of human life is close to the thought of the image of God in each and every human being, a most fundamental theological concept for human life and existence. Finally, as a reminder, I would like to quote from the prophet Micah (Micah 6:6-8):

“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give the firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”¹⁶

When our acts are just, when justice is done, in loving kindness and a humble walk with God, then we might be able to embody and confess unity.

Gunvor, *Visjonen om likeverdet. Det økumeniske tiåret 1988-1998 Kyrkjer i solidaritet med kvinner i El Salvador og Noreg, Kenya og Japan*, Arcus, Lund, 2002. See also Sporre, K., “Women’s Human Rights in Sweden: A Feminist Ethical Perspective”, in *Building a Human Rights Culture. South African and Swedish Perspectives*, Karin Sporre och H. Russel Botman, (eds.), Report from Arts and Education,

16 *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, Cokesbury, Nashville, 1990.

5. THE COMMENT AND A RESPONSE

After I had presented this paper Rev Pieter Grove challenged me with the following reflection: he wanted me to consider whether it could not be regarded as a form of arrogance by a woman like Daphne Hampson to opt out of Christianity when women are not equally represented as men within this religion. If you, for instance instead of women, took the situation of slaves who for centuries were subdued and kept under most inhuman conditions and yet, even in the midst of these horrendous conditions, they did not opt out of the Christian faith. Their Christian faith was a source to keep and renew them. Don't we all have to face ambiguity in the Christian church as a result of our failures as human beings? Is it not a form of arrogance then to leave?

I am most grateful for the comment. It gives me something to reflect on as to what kind of attitude or posture you can choose to take vis-à-vis a community you are part of; to opt out or stay, to criticise and leave, or stay, criticise and change. It also addresses our need to live through and have our faith nourished in a community.

My other response to this valuable comment is that, however interesting I find Hampson's question and argument, I do not share her evaluation of what constitutes what could be called the value centre of the Christian faith. She presumes it to be a patriarchal value centre and so forcefully critiques it. I do not hold such a value centre to be at the core of the Christian faith, but rather trust another one to be operating: a value centre where each and every human being has an equal and unique value as expressed in the concept that each and every human has been created in the image of God. A profound argument for the fundamentality of this conviction is to be found in the interpretation of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through centuries as an expression of a commitment to the equal value of all human beings and so to equally valuing them.¹⁷ However, the problem I have is that I so often see a patriarchal value centre, as critiqued by Hampson, operating in the practice of churches, being reflected in theological works and also, not so seldom, being theologically defended both by leaders and members.

5.1 To change

Speaking of the nourishment of faith one also has to recognise that for the women (and men) who have difficulties with the subordination of women under men, and who consequently have problems with the unevenness in the representation of genders when speaking of the divine, worshiping may often be a repetition of exactly that which gives them difficulties with the church. Sharing in worship then may not sustain them, but rather undermine their faith and spirituality.

One also has to admit that the task to change is enormous, because when it comes to the oppression of women there is a most complicating fact. The holy texts of the Christian tradition, as well as the language used in referring to the divine, were shaped in times when equality between women and men were not a reality. This demands an enormous re-interpretation of the Christian faith as such. This also demands that patriarchal terminology should, consciously or not, not be repeated in liturgies, so that these inequalities should not be re-inscribed into new generations of girls and boys, women and men. To break men's subordination of women and free us all to just and liberating relationships is a task beyond imagination that demands the concerted efforts of many.

As so many are erring on these issues - entire church traditions sometimes do not ordain women - I am most uncertain as to how a proclamation that the current subordination of women

17 This resonates well and is in line with the second paragraph of the Belhar confession.

constitutes *status confessionis* would work, not the least regarding the process of monitoring it. In the first place, would any church be so brave so as to oppose another tradition on this issue? Would men (and the few women) in leadership dare to give leadership and direction on these matters? One has to state that it would definitely be theologically in line with earlier standpoints to issue such a proclamation – not the least given the state of affairs within churches, but also in society at large. And I must say that it worries me to accept the subordination of women under men as a matter of the fallen nature of humankind. Is it not rather to be regarded as a matter of failures of mankind (not humankind, *sic!*), which includes failures regarding the existence of the economic, social, emotional and sexual privileges of men?

5.2 Whose integrity at stake?

In comparing the text by Daphne Hampson and the decision of WARC 1982¹⁸ when a *status confessionis* was declared against apartheid, a difference in the use of the concept integrity comes to the fore. Hampson uses the concept integrity in an individual sense, i.e. the integrity of the woman remaining or not in a church where she is not valued equally to others. In the WARC text the integrity at stake is described as the integrity of the common confession of the Reformed churches. It was said that it was not possible to differ in the judgement of apartheid without seriously jeopardising the integrity of the common confession of the churches.¹⁹

When speaking of the subordination of women, which has resulted in oppression and discrimination, it remains to me a profound unanswered question, that churches still have done so little to stand up for women and to lay bare how the mechanisms of subordination operate and anchor themselves within churches and theology. This issue I would like South African Christians as well as others to take on, in a global effort to renew and reform Christianity, to prove that the image of God in all human beings is at the core of the Christian faith, in dogma and practise, to do this (to do justice), and so to contribute to wholeness and a truer unity – confessed and embodied!

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18 For references and quotes see footnote no. 2 and 5.

19 Within WARC from 1997 new work was started to discuss economic globalisation and economic injustice as a matter of *processus confessionis*. The work lead up to the recently held General Council in Accra, August 2004. For further information see http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=41&part_id=1&navi=1 (2004-11-22). See also *Reformed World*, Vol. 50:2, Vol. 51:3, Vol. 54:1 and Vol. 54: 2&3. At an ecumenical conference in 2002 Rev. Anna Karin Hammar spoke of different aspects of *status confessionis*, see Hammar, A.K. at <http://www.warc.ch/pc/soester/06.html> (2004-11-22).

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