

Doing Gender Justice as a Mission Imperative

God's Justice and Ours

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Announcement of the kingdom of God

The gospel of Luke describes John the Baptist going throughout Jordon, proclaiming a baptism of repentance: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Luke 3: 4–5). When the people ask John, "What then should we do?" John doesn't moralize, but responds proactively:

"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages." (Luke 3: 11–14)

In other words, to prepare the path for God's kingdom is to actively do justice and destroy the consequences of the sin. What we have in the words of John the Baptist is an expression of Christological eschatology, i.e. the kingdom of God is going to be given to us as a gift, but at the same time we have been called to "make the path smooth" in our acceptance of the gift. In that sense, eschaton is God–human endeavour, the kingdom that we're awaiting from God is anticipated and expressed in history through the praxis of human beings that should iconize the new eon. In Gustavo Gutiérrez's words, "The hope which overcomes death must be rooted in the heart of historical praxis; if this hope doesn't take shape in the present to lead it forward, it will be only an evasion, a futuristic illusion." Christological eschatology means one important thing: it

¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 124.

is divine-human synergy, just as Christ has divine-human nature as defined by the ecumenical council of Chalcedon. It isn't a communist utopia in which heaven on earth will be brought about by the proletariat, or a utopia of Zealots during the time of Jesus that human will is capable of bringing kingdom of God. We sometimes forget this truth and make ourselves passive in history through the expectation that God will do everything exclusively. We forget sometimes that "from the very beginning Christianity was socially minded. The whole fabric of Christian existence is social and corporate. All Christian sacraments are intrinsically 'social sacraments,' i.e., sacraments of incorporation . . . To build up the church of Christ means, therefore, to build up a new society and, by implication, to re-build human society on a new basis."2

The New Testament reveals the kingdom of God as a new mode of relationship, a new quality of life. The kingdom is proclaimed when the sick and the poor are healed, when the dead are resurrected, when the disenfranchised are accepted, when abundance of food is offered to many, when justice, love, peace, harmony, and solidarity rule (Matt. 4:23, 5:10, 25:34; Luke 9:2, 9:12-18; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:9). Let's look at the words from the beginning of the liturgy in the Orthodox Church: "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Through these opening words, the liturgy is supposed to open up toward the eschatological kingdom, "a progressive movement towards the fullness of the kingdom of Christ, toward His cosmic and historical triumph."3

The kingdom of God should be manifested in all of its social implications through historical limitations. It means that the liturgy should not reflect a patriarchal mode of relationship, the degradation of women, ⁴ disregard of lay people, ⁵ and inaccessibility for the sick and elderly. Primacy should be given to these issues that collide with the values of God's kingdom. Genesis 3:16 argues that man should rule over woman, but this verse comes as a consequence of the sin – the fall. This verse only expresses how the male-female relationship has been lived or conducted in our communities where the ideology of men rules, and not God's given/original order.

Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Orthodoxy and Political Theology (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 117.

Alexander Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology (Crestwood: SVS Press, 2003), 181.

At several conferences (Agapia 1976, Crete 1989, Rhodes 1988, Damascus 1996, Contantinople 1997, Durres, 2010), orthodox women theologians pointed out the fatal liturgical practice of our church; however, nothing has improved yet.

Division between clerics and lay persons is evident through the issue of the language usage in the liturgy. It is at this point that the criterion of the past has a primacy. Thanks to the Volos Academy for Theological Studies this question was raised again in 2012.

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (Acts 2:17)

In the eschatological community of the Holy Spirit we have been called to have dreams and visions of the world to come. The Holy Spirit is calling us not to deprive ourselves from dreams – the dreams that a just community of male and female is possible. With our dreams and visions we are able to witness the eschatological signs in history.

"But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33). This is another example that signifies that kingdom of God should inspire us for today's life. "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:12). The "violent" signifies here those who fought in history through praxis so as to announce the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. And eschatology doesn't imply denial of the present, "because the *eschaton* does not destroy but rather transforms history, turning it into eschatological history and imbuing it with meaning and purpose."

It is from within this framework – the framework of eschatology and kingdom for the whole of humanity – that I would like us to think about gender justice. In the following sections, I will discuss this concept of justice in two contexts: first, gender justice in the context of God's justice; and second, gender justice in the context of kingdom of God. Within these two contexts and insisting that the search for gender justice is at the centre of our Christological and ecclesiological preoccupation, I further argue against the temptation of reducing this pilgrimage of justice and peace to a mere feminist agenda, nor just a matter of market ideology. All our theological undertakings, reflection, and praxis will be irrelevant if gender justice is not part of God's justice agenda nor part of God's kingdom values – if gender justice is not a mission imperative.

Gender justice in the context of God's justice

What is gender justice in the context of God's justice? In Psalm 85:11–13, the Psalmist declares: "Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps."

⁶ Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Orthodoxy and Political Theology (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 110.

God's justice builds a road toward peace and happiness here on earth. In the Old Testament, before Israel became a kingdom, deeds of elected people were identified with deeds of God and God's energies. Through his energies God expresses his own will constituting his justice in history. Taking such a perspective of God's justice we can come to the idea of gender justice as core to God's justice and peace agenda. In this agenda, God's justice aims at bringing the just order in the world. As a God of justice (Is. 30:18), God is interested in fairness as well as in what makes for right relationships. God's actions and decisions are true and right (Job 34:12; Rev. 16:7) and the demands on individuals and nations to look after victims of oppression are just demands (Ps. 82). "As Lord and Judge, God brings justice to nations" (Ps. 67:4) and "sets things right" on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, and the victims of injustice (Ps. 103:6; 146:6–9).

For the wicked, the unjust, and the oppressor, God as the supreme judge of the earth is a dreaded force of justice. But for all who are unjustly treated, God's just action is a reason for hope." Bringing justice to the world, according to our possibilities and our energies, is to bring God's justice. Gender justice should be understood that way too – as part of God's justice. Gender justice is not about women only, it's about a just and better world in which all genders of all ages should benefit. In the face of the still existing gender injustice, we still need to allow more space for women, bringing their perspective, expertise, participation, and energies that enhance the work of bringing justice to the world as a whole. Creating more space for women means making "the rough roads smooth" (Luke 3:5). Involvement of all of us in doing God's justice leads to liberation of in each of us. Liberation such that each uses their gifts and talents does not come through some kind of spiritual freedom, but through a framework in which each created being is free as *imago Dei*, "both in the flesh and in the Lord" (Philemon 16).

Gender justice in the context of kingdom of God

In the context of kingdom of God, gender justice should not imply something negative, i.e., more rights for women, less for men. Gender justice is more positive and proactive in the framework of God's justice and eschatology. Gender justice being God's justice brings more energies and talents from which everyone can only benefit, bringing a new world in which both men and women can operate more freely knowing that what they do is "paving the road." This theological construction for gender justice could be more

⁷ For more on God's justice, see: Μαρία Ι. Παζάρσκη, «Η δικαιοσύνη του Θεού στην Παλαιά Διαθήκη από την εποχή των Πατριαρχών μέχρι και τη μεταιχμαλωσιακή προφητεία», Δελτίο Βιβλικών Μελετών 25, 2007, 9–15

⁸ "Justice of God," *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F Bruce, and R.K. Harrison (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995).

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plausible and acceptable for the Orthodox participants in WCC, testifying that issues of gender justice are not just imported problems from the world, but that they damage and blur the vision and hope that the church should bring to human beings. At the same time, the call of John the Baptist to prepare the way of God should still be echoing in our minds, because we are building that road toward the fulfillment and acceptance of God's gift, i.e. his kingdom. This call is proactive.

Russian philosopher and theologian Soloviev emphasized that it is not possible for us to produce heaven on earth, but we also cannot allow that life on earth becomes hell. To this, John the Baptist would answer: "Not only should you work to stop the Earth from becoming a hell, even more you should work to iconize the kingdom that comes." This proactive element has a strikingly important implication, namely, that denunciation of terrible things in the world concerning injustice to women isn't enough. As Christians, we have been called to work proactively to give more possibilities to women, working together toward a new vision of equality and justice within humankind and wider creation – iconizing the kingdom of God.

Gender justice: Beyond feminism in the world of money

In the global economic system we experience everyday, Michael Chossudovsky has shown how new policies affect women's rights. ¹⁰ In his book *Globalization of Poverty and the New World Order*, he argues that the new monetary system has shown intent to divide men and women in their struggle for rights, breaking the solidarity of men and women "against the new world order." ¹¹ The World Bank advises countries to cut social spending, affecting women in the most negative way, while at the same time the Women in Development Program (a World Bank program) fosters women's rights!

While recognizing the possibility of "market failure" (and consequently the need for state intervention to protect women's rights), the World Bank contends that "free market" broadly supports the "empowerment of women" and the achievement of gender equality.¹²

Chossudovsky finds economic reasons why the struggle between men and women only contributes further to the capitalistic system destroying solidarity between men and

⁹ From the book: Падован Биговић, *Црква и друштво*, Београд, Хиландарски фонд при Богословском факултету СПЦ, 2000, 296.

Chossudovsky, Globalization of Poverty and the New World Order (Pincourt: Center for Research on Globalization, 2003).

¹¹ Ibid., 68.

¹² Ibid., 64.

women, as each group fights for its own rights as if it were separate from and against the other.

As for Christians, there are at least two gods that we can discern in this world: the earthly god and the heavenly God. In some sense they're both metaphysical. The first one is money, or the capitalist system, which many already define as a religion, or the "civil religion of global modernity." The second one is the triune God for most Christians. The monetary system in which we live governs and, in many cases, directs human lives, directs our desires and the way we relate to each other. Multinational companies pressure countries to restructure their economies "to increase profit and maximize accumulation for the rich and the powerful owners of capital." Almost "every aspect of social life is being brought under the direct control of the market. Taking into account, for example, that on average women in the EU earn around 16 % less per hour than men, we can better understand the injustice in this area. Pressure is even more evident in developing countries, with terrible consequences on the issues of gender justice.

Free-market religion has its own market logic, serving to expand options for profit making. This logic is harmful to the liberation of people from hunger and poverty, increasing injustice and inequalities.¹⁹ In the end, the more free-market we become, the more inequalities we'll have,²⁰ increasing spiritual and emotional deprivation. Social cutting pushes everyone to think about every penny, governing their policies, and at the same time destroys the dignity of women by pushing them to the margins of society, leading to the risk of being trafficked as sexual and labour commodities – bonded slaves of the powerful exploiters.

¹³ Валентин Катасонов, "Капитализм и православная вера," at http://zavtra.ru/content/view/kapitalizm-i-pravoslavnaya -vera/

Francis Ching-Wah Yip, Capitalism as Religion? A Study of Paul Tillich's Interpretation of Modernity (Cambridge: University Press for Harvard Theological Studies, 2010), 11.

Mariama Marjorie Williams, "Rethinking Economic Power," in In Search of a Round Table: Gender, Theology & Church Leadership, ed. Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, 101–108 (Geneva: WCC Publications), 102.

¹⁶ Ibid., 104

¹⁷ Tackling the Gender Pay Gap in the European Union, European Commission, at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_pay_gap/130422_gpg_brochure_en.pdf.

¹⁸ The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap (Fall 2014), at http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/

¹⁹ For more on unequal distribution of wages concerning women, see: Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 184.

²⁰ Williams, "Rethinking Economic Power," 104.

Theological or market ideology values

In the early history of Christianity, Augustus Caesar was concerned that the Roman Empire would vanish if the number of childbirths decreased. To increase birth rates, Augustus promulgated laws that supported traditional patriarchal values of male dominance.²¹ For example, he argued that even gods were married and that's why men had to imitate gods (*Dio Cassius* 56.2.5.). In this case, stimulation and acceptance of the law was defended by a theological premise that gods marry. Having children was endorsed, and those who were childless risked punishment according to the law (*Augustus* 34.40.5).²² In his insistence on procreation and good marriage,²³ Augustus Caesar employed both social and theological arguments.²⁴

The New Testament as a book written in this context reflects this situation within the primitive church, as it strove for physical survival. At the time, Christians used whatever means were at their disposal to theologically defend these values of patriarchy, which were not created by the Christian community but rather a consequence of the Roman policy and economic system of that era.

In the pastoral epistles of the New Testament, the male heads of households are urged to govern their households well – keeping their children, slaves, and women submissive as possessions rather than fellow human beings deserving of equality and justice. By exercising power over these within their households, then, they would qualify as potential leaders in the church itself (1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12–13).²⁵ Often, the unjust relationships and the domination of life in community that result from egoistic accumulation of power and money have been defended theologically as a God-given order. Inversely, God through Jesus has clearly shown that just and right relationships, rather than domination and injustice, are the measure of participating in God's reign.

Christ's action in the Temple, whether historical or not, marks the path we should follow. In the "Temple action," Christ tried symbolically to erase those forces that represent the earthly god of mammon. Obviously, this god is a destructive force not only in relations between humans, but also between God and humans. This cleansing of the Temple

²¹ Judith Evans Grubbs, ed., Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 84.

²² Bruce W. Winter, Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 40.

For adultery Augustus prescribed punishment both for males and females: Grubbs, Women and the Law, 84.

²⁴ Dio Cassius 56.2.5.

David G. Horrell, "From ἀδελφοὶ to οἶκος Θεοῦ: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity," Journal of Biblical Literature 120:2 (2001), 307.

signifies our need to cleanse theology of earthly gods and their consequences. In other words, we shouldn't theologically defend values that represent products of unjust economic structures and an oppressive monetary system – accumulation of money, consumerist desires, etc. These "market ideology values" should be deconstructed by theologians and Christian life instead of defended through the language of theology. In other words, *churches should be aware finally that "market ideology" and its consequences cannot be identical to theology*. In the future, we should be able to discern what in our tradition has been a result of theological mistakes and what has been the result of economic mistakes. Theology should struggle to liberate human beings from the tyranny of worldly gods, i.e., the free market and the hegemonic rulers of the modern world. In that sense, we could discern that we cannot defend the unjust treatment of women as a consequence of the social and economic system throughout history on the basis of theology.

The church requires a vision in which theology is able to translate the vision of the "different world" into everyday reality. With "gender justice" we're paving the way for the coming inclusive kingdom of God, i.e., providing opportunities for women and men to reveal and use their energies, gifts, and uniqueness to make the road *smoother*. If we want to be authentic in our vision, iconizing eschatological hope here and now, it is necessary to provide enough inclusive space to allow everyone to realize their capacities and reach their highest potential in their service to creation and to God as their mission. This way, gender justice should not be identified as justice for only women – making more divisions in society – but rather is aimed at holistically building a just community of men and women, where every member of creation lives and flourishes to the glory of their creator.

If we understand *gender justice* in the structure of tension between history and eschatology, between our responsibilities as Christians to build the vision toward the coming kingdom and its fulfillment, then we could identify *gender justice* with the aspirations and struggles for God's justice and his kingdom. Such a struggle for the fulfillment of the kingdom at the end would benefit the whole of humankind, enriching mutual understanding and mutual sharing of different dynamisms. This will not happen unless we operate within the scope of a history of open and shared space for men and women that builds up and realizes their diverse gifts.

Gender justice: Christological issues

Some theologians have Christologically implied that Christ had sexual urges because he took human nature, which they identify exclusively with "male" nature. ²⁶ Unfortunately,

²⁶ Thomas C. Odeon (*The Word of Life* [Peabody: Prince Press, 2001], 117–18) concentrated primarily on Christ's maleness writing on his sexuality.

what they do not say is that Christ would have had sexual urges if he accepted only male nature in fullness. Yet reading the Christological decisions of Chalcedon (451 AD), it is obvious that Christ took all of humanity, ²⁷ i.e., in the fullness of male and female nature. In the famous Chalcedon definition of faith, it has been said that Christ is truly God and truly human, θεόν αληθώς και άνθρωπον αληθώς.²⁸ The word άνθρωπος suggests the whole of human being (male and female), and not male only. In other words, Christ could not have had sexual urges because he isn't fully male only, but fully human, which is something completely different. But this question about Christ's nature does not only address concerns about Christ's sexuality, but also about our understanding of gender justice. In the context of Christology, it is Christ who lives life as fully human in his nature: one hundred percent male and one hundred percent female. To build his body, that is, the church, means to build on these foundations respecting his holistic humanity: fullness of male and female. Would we be authentic in our witnessing of Christ in history if we're not ready to accept the full participation of male and female in his body? On the other hand, his fullness of humanity doesn't repudiate our sexuality. On the contrary, our human sexuality has been preserved showing the longing to encompass the fullness of human nature. Through sexuality, men and women testify to the fullness of human nature; it is a sign of our longing for the fullness of being human.²⁹

In that sense, Christology easily slips into ecclesiological questions. It is only in this context that we should realize that gender justice is not just a moral question or a question of human rights; it rather goes much deeper to the challenging of our theology and our understanding of all of the consequences of the Chalcedon faith. Our faithfulness to Chalcedon isn't only a matter of our oral recognition of the letter of decision in 451AD, but rather, and especially, the practical acceptance of this decision and a true understanding of these consequences if we want to be authentic.

In Christ we have two wills, a fact that has been recognized in the long battle for Orthodoxy in the Sixth Ecumenical Synod (681 AD). Christ, against monothelitism, had two natures and two wills (δύο φυσικάς Θελήσεις/ δύο φυσικάς ενεργίας),³⁰ united through one person of Christ. His human will followed Christ's divine will revealing the true humanity, revealing the true aim of humanity – what human beings

²⁷ Constantinos Yokarinis, "The Priesthood of Women: A Look at Patristic Teaching," in Kyriaki Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the "Sign of the Times," ed. Karidoyanes FitzGerald, 167–77 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999).

²⁸ Joannes Dominicus Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio VII, 108–17; the same repeated in 681 AD: Mansi XI, 637.

²⁹ Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood: SVS Press, 1996), 22–24.

³⁰ Mansi XI, 637.

 $(\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\sigma\varsigma)$ could be in its fullness. In that sense, humanity has been elevated to its full potential through unity with the divine will in the one person of Christ. It is the church's call to elevate human potential – both male and female – in her (the church's) body. These teachings of the church through the ecumenical synods (4th and 6th respectively) give a firm ground to understand that issues of gender justice are a matter of deep theological considerations and they are essential to our faith. Gender justice, understood as the possibility to elevate the human capacities of both male and female, has been an issue of our faithfulness to the church-revealed truth of Christ.

Conclusion

As theologians we could accept this analysis, adding that a breaking of the solidarity between men and women is a breaking of the road that we have been called upon to build in the process of anticipating the eschatological fulfillment. In essence, gender justice is not an issue about rights for or a fight against a group of people or someone. Gender justice is about God's justice and our call to the struggle to fulfill as much as possible of that justice in the constraints of history. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa: "Woman is in the image of God equally with man. The sexes are of equal worth. Their virtues are equal, their struggles are equal... Would a man be able to compete with a woman who lives her life to the full?" Gender justice is therefore about whether we are able to iconize God's kingdom in the best possible way with all the abilities that God gave us, otherwise we "hide our talents in the ground" (Matt. 25:25). Saint Maximos prophetically announced that the truth is matter of the eschatological state. This has a profound impact on our view of the present. We cannot be satisfied with the present because the present doesn't express the truth; but we have been called to challenge every present reality on our way toward the truth, i.e., the eschatological state of the church.

Our sin is even greater than in the gospel story in which one man hid his own talent that he received from God – in the context of gender justice, men often "hide God's talents that have been given to women."

Woman has the same spiritual dignity as man. Both of them have the same God, the same Teacher, the same Church. They breathe, see, hear, know, hope and love in the same way. Beings who have the same life, grace and salvation are called . . . to the same manner of being.³³

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, Let Us Make Man in Our Image and Likeness, 2nd discourse (PG44, 276).

 $^{^{32}}$ «Σκιά τὰ τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, εἰκὼν τὰ τῆς Νέας Διαθήκης, ἀλήθεια ἡ τῶν μελλόντων κατάστασις», in the: Ιωάννης Ζηζιούλας, "Το Μυστήριο της Εκκλησίας και το Μυστήριο της Αγίας Τριάδος", Sabornost 49, 43–52.

³³ Clement of Alexandria, *Tutor*, I,4 (PG 8, 260).

Gender justice should be defined through the framework of eschatological hope for all humankind and our readiness to pave that road here and now, employing all our gifts. Gender justice should be defined through God's justice: that is, to proclaim the values of God's kingdom we need to engage all possible resources in all that kingdom's diversity. Women's energy and faculties are here to work for God's justice – working for an alternative, more inclusive society that reflects God's reign. In that sense, the church needs to become a society in which a person, as an individual, can be put in the service of God and be offered a cure to heal the whole human, spiritually and bodily.

In our dialogue in the WCC, we should avoid a *globalist* mentality that disrespects local contexts. In the same way that market ideology brings economic globalism, we should avoid theological globalism – imposing some issues on everyone. I would propose that our dialogue should be conducted in a proactive and positive manner. If some churches achieve more gender justice, those examples need to be accentuated in WCC, enriching our dialogue with positive models.³⁴ Personally, I believe that gender justice in WCC shouldn't be achieved through criticism and imposition of our own theological concepts on all church members and their contexts. Gender justice as criticism and theological globalism would only deepen the trenches and build walls between member churches. Providing positive examples in which gender justice benefits the church and society in general would be much more desirable. It would welcome all member churches to engage in gender justice as core to the nature and mission of the church, which is journeying together toward life.

God's kingdom is inclusive and therefore gender justice becomes an expression of God's reign as an inclusive concept, not as a concept that oppresses through theological globalism. Respecting such an inclusive concept, we learn to respect others. In this way, rather than developing a justice agenda in a polemical way, we will work together toward creating communities where women and men have the freedom to contribute to gender justice more positively – where gender justice is central to the church's justice and peace agenda.

³⁴ Orthodox participants often understood, justly or not, gender justice as a way of secular or Western globalism in the most aggressive and disrespectful way to Orthodox Church, see for example: "An Orthodox Statement on the Prague Consultation" in *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*, ed. Gennadios Limouris, 110–11 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994).