



An integrated, peaceful world

by [Margaret Gonzalves](#)

Jul. 18, 2017 in

- [Equality](#)

Of the 500 leaders of various religions at a 2009 Peace Conference of Religious Leaders in the Vatican, not a single woman was invited. One of the eminent speakers at that conference expressed surprise, pointing out that men who start and fight the wars badly need the presence and contribution of women in the decision-making process in order to create a culture of peace. How many of us think it is vital to have the wisdom of women at the highest levels of decision making if we are to have a peaceful world? How many of us think a female perspective is different from a male perspective, and, it is badly needed in order to balance a male perspective?

Let me tell you a parable:

There were three men trying to measure the height of a tall flagpole. The first man stretched as far as he could to the top, but he couldn't reach it. The second man got a chair, stood on it and stretched, but still couldn't reach it. The third man got up on the chair, stood on his tiptoes and had the second guy stand on his shoulders and stretch, but they still couldn't reach the top of that flagpole.

Now, there was a woman passing by who saw this game playing out.

She went over to the flagpole, observed for a minute, and unscrewed the flagpole and pulled it out of its stand and laid it on the ground. Then she took a measuring tape out of the sewing kit in her purse. She measured the pole from one end to the next and told the men the length of the flagpole and continued on her way.

When she was finally out of earshot, one of the three men looked at the other to say, "Now, isn't that just like a woman? You ask her for the height and she gives you the length."

The parable indicates clearly that women perceive things differently, adapt things differently and are affected by things differently than men. Like women in the world's major religions, in Christianity, too, women have been given a secondary place. While one cannot deny that Christianity has done much for the dignity and liberation of women, there is still a long way to go. Christianity holds that all men and women are created equal in the image and likeness of God. However, can anyone give a convincing explanation for why it is in Roman Catholicism that women are totally excluded from official decision-making positions of authority in the church?

Scripture and tradition have been interpreted for several centuries by males, from a patriarchal mindset. Women have been domesticated, dominated and trampled upon. This has led to devastating consequences. The real cause lies in the patriarchal mindset, instituted by patriarchal religions in a predominantly patriarchal world. Males rule!

While the parable highlights the different perspectives between men and women, it is important to see men and women not as rivals, but as partners and co-pilgrims for peace in our global family. Today, don't we understand that both men and women have masculine and feminine dimensions? Who doesn't think that we need to be about the business of integrating them in a harmonious balance? Aren't male and female united and interconnected in the image of God? I think we need to learn how to discover our human identity, as part of the cosmic family and not apart from it.

In Christianity, there are several progressive groups of women and men who are advocating for equality in the church and society. There are also traditionalists who resist the change that would include women as equals in the church.

Jesus the peacemaker inspired us to work for a world of peace, a world where all are children of God. He took a radical stand for women and Mother Earth. He said "no" to the "powers that be" and had to pay the price. Jesus was inspired by his mother, Mary, who said "yes" to God's will. Have we sufficiently highlighted Mary's resounding "no" to the powers of the day? In the famous hymn the Magnificat, she proclaims a God who overthrows the patriarchal society that values wealth, power and prestige.

The Psalms speak of God's presence in the whole of creation. St. Francis of Assisi calls the sun his brother and the moon his sister, which reminds us of the insight of all tribal peoples who say, "All are my relatives." I am inspired by the Cosmic Christ of Teilhard de Chardin, a priest and scientist who integrated an evolutionary understanding of creation and incarnation. From Chardin's perspective, not only human beings and Mother Earth, but the whole cosmos, is our family.

If we want a peaceful world we need to reinterpret our scriptures and traditions to include not only the height but also the length, not only the perspectives of men, but also the perspectives of women, not only the masculine, but also the feminine dimension.

Men and women all over the world are taking small steps to create ripples of peace at a time when religion is being used to legitimize domination and violence over the other: other gender, other caste, other color, other creed, other nation, other religion and even Earth as "other," not mother. Beyond this I see the potential of alternative forms of Sacred Community where all are treated as equals. What if the whole world was my family? Then, how could a narrow and sectarian view of religion survive?

We are co-pilgrims; we are God-bearers, called by God to be incarnate lovers of him and the entire cosmic family. We can say praise and thanksgiving to God and no to hunger, no to rape, no to murder, no to disease, no to war and no to all forms of violence. We can touch our inner

peace as we touch the world with peace! We can give heed to our call to witness to the message of unity and peace. We can honor and respect the Earth as our beloved Mother.

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Published by *Global Sisters Report* July 18, 2017