



LWF Gender Justice Policy:  
Tool for ongoing reformation of Lutheran theology on women  
in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC)

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**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this book to my late father. Although he was an imperfect man, he was a masculine image model that made me what I am. He never belittled us, his three daughters or our mother, as women. He took care of us and made us what we are even though we lived in a patriarchal environment where women were looked down by both the community and the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC). The grief of his absence became a great force for me during the time I wrote this paper. I know that he would be proud of me and my research if he was still there. He disagreed with the fact that I studied theology because he already knew the challenges that awaited me in the path that I have chosen within the MLC. All of this has encouraged me to continue my long journey in my fight for a better future for the all the women and the female theologians who are facing difficulties in their vocation to serve in the MLC.

I dedicate similarly this book to my daughter Dunah. Although she has no choice, she had to endure my long absence during my stay in Norway. Both my studies and my research have strengthened me while I was away from her even though it is hard for me to leave her for just a year in Madagascar. The battle I take today is also for her and the next generations in order for them to have a better world in the future both in the MLC and the society.

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“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”

Isaiah 43:1 (NIV)

With that motto of the association of the female theologian in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC), I thank God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who has called me in a way that I did not expect, to do theological study and this research on gender justice. I thank Him for His guidance in writing and completing this book.

I thank the MLC, a place where I was able to see the great work of God that awaits me and all the MLC members. I am thankful to the different boards of the MLC for their approval to my further study. I thank both the MLC headquarter and the Regional Synod of Mahajanga, which gave me consent to my study, and has always been supporting me in my study up to the present day. Special thanks go to MLC theological seminary, Sekoly Ambony Loterana momba ny Teolojia (SALT), and all its staff for having given me the opportunity to further my study.

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I also thank the LWF, which nurtured and motivated me to be an active participant in gender justice. It opened my eyes to the understanding of women as the image of God and calls for justice to them. I thank all the brothers and sisters in the LWF who have helped and encouraged me, both in the past and in the present during the writing process.

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## **ABSTRACT**

God created human beings in his image. Unfortunately, the fallen humanity broken its original relationship to God, destroyed its rapport to each other and failed to take care of the creation. However, the salvation work of Christ in the cross only restored the human dignity and restored these damaged connections. Thus, the new children of God testimony the renewal work of Christ, by continuing Christ's salvation work through respecting God and valuing each other.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Gender Justice Policy (GJP) is a tool to accompany its member churches to respect the equality of women and men. As a communion of churches in the Lutheran tradition, the LWF take for granted the "sola scriptura" as "norma normans" and the "solus Christus" as "hermeneutical key". With the diverse interpretations of Martin Luther and his follower's theology on women, the LWF conducted a critical study of biblical texts to re-affirm the equality of all human beings. It is using the contextual approach as a tool to interpret and implement in its churches different contexts the ten principles and the methodologies of its policy.

Offered as a tool to advocate and encourage equal participation of men and women, both in the church and in the society, the LWF GJP was translated in many local languages. The Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) is in its final process of translation and publication of the document. Right interpretation of the biblical foundations of equality of human beings and correct use of the hermeneutical tools for the implementations are provided by this paper. They result from the study of the LWF GJP document. The implementation is improved by the learning from the effective employment of the GJP in the other LWF member churches.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

### **Biblical abbreviation**

Gen: Genesis

Ex : Exodus

1 Chr: 1 Chronicles

Is : Isaiah

Mt : Matthew

Lk : Luke

Rom : Romans

1 Cor: 1 Corinthians

### **General abbreviation**

ILAG: Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CLC: Christ Lutheran Church

CSW: Commission on the Status of Women

DTPW: Department for Theology and Public Witness

EECMY: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

ELCA: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

ELCJHL: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

ELCT: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

ELCZ: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zimbabwe

FBL: Fikambanam-Behivavy Loterana (Women department of the Malagasy Lutheran Church)

GBV: *Gender Based Violence*

*HKI: Huria Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church)*

JELC: Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church

KELC: Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church

KMSL: Komity Mpiandraikitra ny Synoda Lehibe

KMSP: Komity Mpiandraikitra ny Synodam-Paritany

KN-FKTLM: Komity Nasionaly Firaisan'ny Kristiana Tanora Loterana Malagasy

KN-FSFLM: Komity Nasionaly Firaisan'ny Skoto Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy

KSL: Komitin'ny Synoda Lehibe

KSP: Komitin'ny Synodam-Paritany

LAC: **Latin America and the Caribbean**

LCL: Lutheran Church in Liberia

LWF: Lutheran World Federation

LWI: Lutheran World Information

MLC: the Malagasy Lutheran Church

NCA: Norwegian Church Aid

PANAGED : Plan National d'Action Genre et Développement

P.N.P.F. : Politique Nationale de Promotion de la Femme

SALT: Sekoly Ambony Loterana momba ny Teolojia

(SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

STL: Sekoly Teolojika Loterana (Theological Lutheran School)

UELCI: United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India

UEPA: Union of Protestant churches of Alsace and Lorraine

UN: United Nations

UN ECOSOC: United Nations Economic and Social Council

WICAS: Women In Church And Society

WCC: the World Council of Churches



## **IMAGES**

Image 1: MLC and its twenty-five synods

Image 2: The journey of mainstreaming gender justice

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## 1 Chapter 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Traditionally Madagascar was a matriarchal society which valued women highly as mothers and sources of life (Maholy, 2013). Even though the traditional Malagasy gender-based division of work did not allow women to work outside their household it neither devalued the women's household work nor restricted them from having a high leadership position in the family or in society. There were several women that reigned as queen such as Ranaivalona I (1788-1861), Ranaivalona II (1829-1883), Ranaivalona III (1862-1917) at Antananarivo and Rasalimo and Ravahiny in Boeny in the northwest.

However, one of the most important factors that changed the situation of women in Malagasy culture, tradition and society was the arrival of the foreigners in the island through colonization, Christianization and Islamization. That women great consideration and place was deteriorated. For example, the French colonizers copied from their constitution and limited the number of women in the educational system even as queen Ranaivalona II had already defined in the Malagasy constitution the same right to all boys and girls to go to school since 1881 (Mireille Rabenoro, 2012). Another example is patriarchal leadership, brought by the Norwegian Lutheran missionaries since their arrival in 1867. Since most of the missionaries were men, most of the pastoral and leadership position were led by men. There are Muslim teachings that mostly consider women as lower than men (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.8). These also promoted patriarchy. Consequently, the Malagasy society lost its matriarchal value and women started to be neglected, discriminated against, and lost their value and high standing both in the family and society and in different religious institutions. Nevertheless, it is difficult to explore academically as research the sources of that change because of lack of written information and resources. Many official documents, mostly led by non-Malagasy researchers, did not write enough about gender or Malagasy women's place in society. Hence, the current situation only can be told as background of an academic study about women in Madagascar. Articles about Malagasy women often tend to conclude that they are now in a compromised situation because of "their entry into the modern world promoting women and their attachment to cultural heritages discriminating them" (Fee Sarah et al, 2000, p.1). However, as I mentioned earlier, women's traditional place was not one where they were discriminated against.



teachings and traditions as orthodox as possible. She has its common liturgy throughout the country. The national committee makes decisions for the whole church at the national level. On the other hand the different hierarchical committees of the synod, parish and congregations also play a very important role in the implementation of the common decisions and might discuss about some contextual cases. Its structure is common in all places and all its members can recognize each other and always feel united everywhere even outside Madagascar.

Nevertheless, the MLC view and practice, when it comes to women, is not consistent with the Lutheran values and teachings that I have discovered and is promoted at the LWF, especially at the Womens desk called Women In Church And Society (WICAS). That inconsistency of view on women between the MLC and LWF motivated me to study theology and inspired me to be part of the MLC Women theologians. I am willing to transport that Lutheran teaching about women in my church. My desire is to call the MLC to reconsider her theology on women based on that strong value and pride of being Lutheran.

Unfortunately, MLC is one of twenty-seven out of 145 LWF member churches that still do not ordain women. In the thirty-one LWF member churches in Africa, it is one of nine (LWF, 2016, p. 26). The MLC has been discussing the ordination of women since 1975 (S.T.L. Ivory, 1976) when the first four MLC women were allowed to study theology at the MLC seminary STL Ivory Avaratra Fianarantsoa (currently known as SALT) one year before that, in 1974. But after forty-seven years, women are still in the margin of the male-centered dominant circle. In fact, church committees still use the church political structure to vote against women's participation in most of the church leadership positions, ordination and practical tasks that prioritize men over women.

As a response, I will focus my study on how to improve Lutheran teaching on women within the MLC by studying the LWF GJP's interpretation of Lutheran theology on women. The MLC had two representatives during the LWF Council meeting that approved that policy during its annual meeting in the year 2013 and I was one of them. The policy is now in its last process before the publication of its Malagasy version this year 2022. So, this study will focus on how that policy can be a tool of change for MLC by exploring its hermeneutical approach of Lutheran theology on women.

Luther promoted directly women's education and brought changes to women's rights in society (Ibrar Hussain, 2019, 61). This appears in his collected sermons, lectures, pamphlets

polemic writings, letters, informal "table talk" and debates about women (Susan C. Karant-Nunn & Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, 2003, p.4). Luther's work brought changes on the women lower position in the European church and the society life during the sixteenth century reformation. I hope that similar approach can also improve the MLC theology on women in the twenty first century. But I will only focus on the interpretation of the ongoing reformation of the Lutheran theology in the LWF GJP.

### 1.2 Personal motivations and aim of the study

During seven years (2010 – 2017), I was elected to represent the youth of the MLC and the Africa region in the LWF council. Consequently, I was invited by the MLC as a guest, to give report and to represent the LWF at the national level. So, I attended meetings and seminars both at the international and the national levels of the Lutheran churches.

In these meetings, I observed that women were strongly supported, trained and encouraged to participate, to express their opinions and to actively participate in all the LWF activities and meetings. As an example, before every annual meeting of the LWF council, women always have a pre-council meeting for that purpose. However, I noticed an opposite treatment of women and their participation in different MLC committee meetings both at the national (great synod meetings called KSL and KMSL and national department meetings of the youth department called KN-FKTLM and the scout department called KN-FSFLM) and synod levels (called KSP and KMSP).

That observation opened my interested to study the women's situation in the MLC. I was frustrated to notice that it is not only in ordination and in leadership positions that women are excluded. Even in everyday church life, women are considered lower than men. All the background tasks, such as preparing food in the kitchen, preparing the places before and arranging everything at the end of any church gathering, are reserved for women. Men just come and contribute to the discussion at the arranged table, take the decision on behalf of all the church members and often adjust the decision for their sake and benefit.

This inconsistency of view of women between the MLC and the LWF motivated me to study theology and inspired me to respond to my pastoral vocation. Thus, from the beginning, I was interested in Lutheran teaching and theology on women. I plan to contribute on the calling of the MLC to reconsider her ethical teaching and practical morality toward women based on her strong value and pride to be Lutheran. In consequence, I attested in my bachelor dissertation entitled "The women as image of God and the patriarchy" that men

and women are equally created in the image of God (Mami, 2020). And even if the patriarchal social system which is perceived in bible histories seems to give more power to men after the fall in Genesis 3, Jesus's salvation work already restored that divine "Imago Dei" to His believers, both men and women (Mami, 2020, 106). Thus, with that former dogmatic research based on gender justice, I am motivated to follow my research with a more practical solution by improving the MLC theology on women.

Therefore, in this master research, I decided to study the LWF GJP because it has been written by theologians from around the world, with different backgrounds and contexts. They are all under the big umbrella and denomination of the evangelical and Lutheran tradition and seek first on its communion and common Lutheran heritages rather than its differences. Thus, the policy's principles and methodologies have more opportunity to avoid colonialist or geographical approach and dominant interpretation. Accordingly, no particular context or specific case of any specific church was studied nor has been used as a reference model or directive for the material. Only the most common and important part of the Lutheran theology and tradition were used as foundation with the current tendencies of most of its member churches.

The aim of this study is to explore the hermeneutical pattern that the LWF used to interpret the Lutheran theology on women in its policy. Rooted in its biblical and theological reflections, the publication can become a tool for ongoing reformation within the MLC. The enhancement on her theology of women can improve the women's situation. As proud as MLC is of being Lutheran, references to human rights or educational approaches are not sufficient to make changes to MLC's theology on women. In order to handle gender injustice well, one should root suggested improvements in Lutheran teaching. There is reason to believe that a more positive view of women will follow once the MLC bases her teaching on this issue in Lutheran theology. Embedded in them, I will conclude this research with some practical solutions grounded in contextual Malagasy and MLC practice to improve the MLC theology on women.

### 1.3 Research background and context

Based on the LWF Gender Justice Policy (GJP), the present research will focus on gender justice as a matter of faith and church witness to justice (LWF, 2002, p.1) by its theology. However, besides the initiative taken by LWF on gender justice policy many other international organizations and national states, churches and faith-based or non-



governmental organizations, civil societies and many other networks are also now advocating for gender justice through their decisions and publications. Many of these mentioned organization's articles, books and publications inspired me for this research.

According to its website, the United Nations (UN) is the international organization that is the most involved in promoting peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet

(<https://www.un.org/en/about-us>). The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body of the UN Women (<https://www.unwomen.org/en>).

It exclusively dedicates its work to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is an international legal instrument ratified by 189 countries in 2016 (UN Women, 2016, p.14). It requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women's and girl's equal rights. In 1995, the Beijing declaration and platform for Action policy paper was adopted by 189 Governments to achieve gender equality and empower women

(<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm>). However, since no country has achieved equality for women and girls (UN Women, 2014, p.9), the declaration was reprinted by the UN Women in 2014. The reprinted document aims at reviewing and accelerating the implementation of actions that eliminate the discrimination against women and girls at national, regional and international levels.

Gender equality is a shared vision of social justice and human rights that everyone has a responsibility to act accordingly (UN Women, 2014, p.10). ~~Thus,~~ religion and faith-based organization play important roles in affirming women's human rights because justice is a biblical and theological concept (LWF, 2019, p.5). The World Council of Churches is one of the international organizations which campaigns for gender justice. According to its website, WCC is a fellowship of 352 member churches which altogether represents more than a half billion Christians around the world (<https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches>). It has dedicated a special book to honor women's leadership and contributions in its history (WCC Publication, 2015, p.2). It has published numerous books, articles and reports which promote gender justice. The following publications are examples of their relevant publications that condemn violence against women in the church and in the society:

"Women, Violence and Nonviolent Change" (WCC Publications, 1996), "No Longer a Secret: The Church and the Violence against Women" (WCC Publication, 1997), "When Pastors Prey: Overcoming Clergy Sexual Abuse of Women" (WCC Publication, 2013). Their main purpose is

to support the equality of men and women in the eyes of God and deny all the male religious leader's teachings which exalt or subjugate women (WCC Publication, 2013, p.xi).

The second international faith-based organization whose publications inspired me for this research is the Act Alliance. Act Alliance is a global faith-based coalition organized in national and regional forums operating among 137 members in 127 countries (<https://actalliance.org>). For Act Alliance, gender equality and women's empowerment are at the heart of its vision (Act Alliance, 2012, p.1). It states clearly, in its strategy, strong opposition to any discrimination based on gender identity (Act Alliance, 2015, p.5). Act Alliance launched its Gender Justice Program to challenge patriarchy and other discriminatory structures of power and oppression to end gender inequality, injustice and gender-based violence (<https://actalliance.org/gender-justice/>). ACT Gender Equality Policy Principles were approved by ACT International Emergency Committee on 18 April 2008 to ensure gender equality in all its structure and programs. ~~Then~~, the Act Alliance Gender Justice Policy was approved by the ACT Alliance Governing Board in June 2017 as a mandatory policy for all its members (Act Alliance, 2017, p.1). At its regional level, the Africa gender justice community of practice launched its implementation process in Africa (Act Alliance, 2022) on 17 February 2022.

One of its national level publications for implementation is from the Act Alliance Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). It presents some of the best practices and lessons learned from the Act Alliance Global Gender Based Violence (GBV) program 2016-2020. It provides theological reflection, sensitization, developing manuals and curricula methods that engage faith actors and religious leaders to speak out about gender equality based on political and moral concerns (Act Alliance Norwegian Church Aid, 2018, p.4).

In addition to the abovementioned publications, the following publications by national churches gave me additional inspiration and methods to challenge gender injustices, its roots and consequences. Some of them highlight the biblical and theological perspective: "Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective (Hisako Kinukawa, 1994) and "The Cry of Tamara" (Pamela Cooper-White, 1995). These following give more highlight on the definition of violence and its psychological aspects and how to deal with them practically: "Ties that Bind: Domestic Violence against Women" (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 1996), "Recognizing and Naming Power." (Ranjini Wickramaratne-Rebera, 1998), "Improving well-being through education: Integrating Community Based Psychological

Support into education in Emergencies.” (The Finn Church Aid, 2018), “In Violence we forget who we were.” (GBV Services in Lebanon in Response to the Syrian Crisis, 2019).

Agreeing with these above-mentioned works, gender justice comes to be an integrated part of Lutheran theology. Thus, faith reflections on gender approach have developed in Lutheran theology. But the way of struggling for gender just relations and structures cannot be taken in a uniform perspective in different countries’ contexts (Elaine Neuenfeldt, 2017, p.1). Thus, the LWF has published different articles and resources related to gender that are coordinated by the Women In Church And Society (WICAS) desk. One of them is based on Mark 10:43 and entitled "It will not be so among you! " A Faith Reflection on Gender and Power (LWF, 2010). The document refers to the biblical and theological reflections. Its recent publication entitled “Women on the Move” looks back on the journey undertaken by the LWF towards full inclusion and participation of men and women in the life of the church and society. It shares hopeful history of participation of impressive women and men around the world. The gender justice became a common commitment for inclusiveness in most of the Lutheran churches and organizations. The policy is rooted on theology, history and the women human right. They are carried in prayer and implemented in liturgy (LWF, 2018)

#### 1.4 Research questions

Madagascar is one of the countries that ratified the CEDAW UN documents which promote gender justice in its governmental programs. As a member of the LWF, WCC and the Act Alliance, the MLC is aware and has "theoretically agreed" on the use of all these above mentioned resources. The LWF publication entitled "Churches say no to justice against women" (LWF, 2002) was translated into the Malagasy language and printed by the MLC women desk called FBL (Fikambanam-Behivavy Loterana) from 2003 (FBL, 2003). The LWF GJP is now on the final process of translation in the Malagasy language and will be published soon.

However, they remain as silent documents. They do not have efficient application in the MLC life. The MLC theology on women is not in line with the content of these publication. That leads to my research question:

"How can the interpretation of the Lutheran theology in the LWF GJP be used to improve Lutheran teaching on women in the MLC?"

Thus, to respond to that main question, these secondary questions are deliberated in this paper: (1) Which Lutheran theology are interpreted in the LWF GJP? (2) How does the LWF

GJP interpret the ongoing reformation of Lutheran theology on women? and (3) How can the LWF GJP interpretation of Lutheran theology be used to improve the MLC theology on women?

### 1.5 Methodology and limitations

Since the main part of this project is the study of the LWF GJP, this paper is considered first as literature-based research. And since that main document is related to other resources, I must collect and analyze many other data that are related to it. I will present and analyze them with a critical reflection based on my theoretical framework. But since the aim of the study is to improve the theology on women within the MLC, interviews and historical research on past actions undertaken by the MLC related to gender justice are also very important because of the lack of written documents ~~about it~~.

For that reason, this study is limited to the improvement of the MLC theology on women. One of its long-term goals is to improve the situation of the women in the MLC and the Malagasy society. Nevertheless, that result can only be attended after a change in the church's teaching and consideration of women. As Martin Luther did during the sixteenth century, the reformation started from the church but impacted the society and the whole world.

### 1.6 Structure of the thesis

This paper is organized in five chapters that have different sections.

The first chapter is a general introduction. I will present the background of the study with my personal motivations that define the aim of the study and the research questions that are related to the research background and the context. Then I will explain the methodology and limitations of the study before giving that structure.

The second chapter has three sections. The first one is the problem statement. It will clarify the need of the description of the definition of the key terms and the definition of the theoretical framework, which are the two following sections.

The third chapter will give an overall presentation of the LWF and the LWF GJP that are relevant to the understanding of the material before the presentation and the analysis of its content.

The chapter four is the most important part of this study. It will discuss and critically evaluate the LWF GJP and its implementation in different LWF member churches. The biblical

foundations of the Lutheran theology and their hermeneutical approach to promote gender justice will be studied. The effective use of its hermeneutical model of the Lutheran theology to promote gender justice is the most important model to be studied in this chapter. This chapter will point out the differences of these hermeneutical models and clearly states its steps.

The last chapter is about reflections and answers to the research question. It will evaluate the productivity of the LWF GJP. That chapter will also summarize my opinion about the document and will look forward on how it can be used in the MLC context.

## **2 Chapter 2: PROBLEM STATEMENT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will pose the problem statement, define the key terms and discuss relevant theories. Those theories are relevant for the analysis of the LWF GJP's hermeneutical approaches. They will also make clear the understanding of the Lutheran theology on women.

Issues related to women, gender justice, Lutheran theology and ongoing reformation can be argued from different perspectives as we have seen in the previous chapter. But in this chapter, I will focus the discussion and define these terms according to how the LWF GJP interprets them. Thus, the definition of these key concepts is fundamental.

Nonetheless, it is important to define the problem statement. The problem is regarding the women's situation and the injustice they experience in the MLC. Besides the complexity of Martin Luther's writings and the diversity of its interpretation affected the current situation. They do not clearly state the Lutheran teaching on women. Thus, MLC tends to promote those teachings which consider women lower than men.

Therefore, I plan to study the LWF GJP to be a tool to improve the MLC's teachings on women. Their theological reflections can become a tool to improve that teaching. As a church which is proud to be Lutheran, dealing with gender injustice using women's human rights and educational approaches only, are not enough for the MLC members to be adopted.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework will only focus on the analytical concepts that I found in the LWF JGP. They are related to ongoing reformation, critical and contextual hermeneutics based on the hermeneutics of suspicion. It is besides important to notice from that first introductory paragraph the use of the feminine to refer to the church. It is related to the Greek and many other lexical words that defines her as feminine. Also as the wife of Christ in its theological sense.

## **2.1 Problem statement**

### **2.1.1 Women and gender injustice**

In most societies, women are historically excluded because of gender differences and inequalities. These differences are associated with social interactions and relationship, roles and responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources and decision-making opportunities (LWF, 2013, p.37). Therefore, women are vulnerable or made vulnerable by laws and cultures that regulate norms and low status of women (Musa, 2004, p.ix). Unequal power relations between men and women often lead and justify sexual and gender-based violence (GBV). Rooted in social gender norms and practices, millions of girls and women in the world are affected by that form of injustice (Act Alliance Norwegian Church Aid, 2018, p.4). Unfortunately, structural violence to individuals or groups is often collectively maintained and validated in the name of order and stability and goes unchecked (LWF, 2002, p.24).

In addition, religion, church and faith communities are often inappropriately used as tools to oppress women. Women were excluded of the history of theology (Pedersen, 2010, p.190). Most of the root cause of faith-based injustice derived is from the reading of their authoritative books (Musa, 2004, p.ix). However, it is argued that one of the tasks of the people of faith is to affirm the liberating potential of religion (LWF, 2002, p.8).

Nonetheless, public policy enabled to break the silence related to that inferior status of women. They reduce different forms of private domestic violence, sexual abuse, trafficking, rituals, rape and harassment (Musa, 2004, p.xi). Thus, either faith-based or social organizations build up policy to fight against them. Nevertheless these policies often stay as quiet documents and are inefficient without clear instruction and commitment for implementation that is adopted to different context.

Below is an example of implementation process of gender justice policy as proposed by the Act Alliance for the Africa region (Act Alliance, 2022).



Image 2: Act Alliance GJP implementation process in Africa

Most of the implementation process starts from the establishment of gender justice policy without the most important analytical and tracking processes. This often leads to an inappropriate and non-contextual execution of the policy which is not productive.

### **2.1.2 Luther's writings and women**

Most of Luther's sermons, lectures, pamphlets polemic writings, letters, informal "table talk" and debates are recorded by his followers. These works were written, translated and interpreted by different authors which Luther approved. But many of them are initiated by printers and editors by copying an earlier edition or with contributions from their own contexts, different perspectives and corresponding audiences. Thus, the diversity of interpretation makes many Lutheran churches confused.

On the other hand, as part of its protestant tradition, Lutheran churches do not have an authoritative theology, as the one international and powerful councils of the Roman Catholic have in its head in Roma. It only has different global and international communions as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC) which can be used as a platform to have a common and basic Lutheran Theology and understanding. But even the foundation of the ILC was based on the difficulty of such kind of theological discussion. The churches that founded the ILC declined their association with the LWF in 1952 because of disagreements related to theological debates (Pearce & Ahlers, 2012, p.3).



Nonetheless, accurate collections of Martin Luther's works were published by scholars of the sixteenth and the nineteenth century (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.3). But still different theologians interpret them differently. The theology of equality of all humans and Luther's views on Mary and many other biblical women have their different meanings in diverse Lutheran churches contexts (Pedersen, 2010, p. 195). Thus, the diversity of interpretation makes many Lutheran churches confused.

### **2.1.3 Complexity of Lutheran theology in ongoing reformation**

Even as Lutheranism was from Germany and grew in Europe, it is no more the only defining center of Lutheran identity. There are growing spaces around the world which are interacting with its historical heritages (Elaine Neuenfeldt, 2017, p.2). Thus, the convergence of many theological narratives is in the tradition of the Lutheran churches (Elaine Neuenfeldt, 2017, p.3). Consequently, contextuality is one of the hallmarks of the Lutheran theology (LWF, 2018, p.20). A church in ongoing reformation remains under the judgment of the gospel to be continuously reformed by the word of God (Ward, 2017, p.265).

In addition to contextuality, many biblical texts confirm that change is possible (Musa, 2004, p.ix). This inspires theologians to always bring up-to-date their work. The history of the healing of the bleeding woman followed by the rising from the dead of a twelve year old girl by Jesus in Luke 8:43-56 supports the possibility of change in women's situation (Musa, 2004, p.x). As Pedersen affirms in her article, the exploration of Luther's works is unfinished (Pedersen, 2010, p. 198). As a result, Lutherans go very wrong either by freezing only one aspect of Luther and his theology or by lifting it to divine heights (Pedersen, 2010, p.198).

Furthermore, Luther and all sixteenth-century writers used different language, spelling and writing's norm compared to the modern writers such as in the use of paragraphs, sentences and punctuations (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.4). Consequently, the editors and translators of their work was obliged to make changes both in the writings and the languages to emerge clearly in their material arrangement. In addition to that, Luther's statements about women and sex appeared mostly in his table talk. Thus, Luther writes differently according to his diverse audiences. Consequently, they do not reflect his most considered opinions (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.5). Nonetheless, many experts on the reformation affirm that Luther's attitude toward women influence the religious and political consideration of women and rose their dignity and place in the family and society (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.6-7). Most of the church historians from Germany pointed out Luther's support of equality of men and

women. They see the sights in Luther's biblical lectures that raised the lower women (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.58-60). Luther's lectures on Genesis clearly states that women are created in the Image of God, equally to Adam (Pelikan, Oswald and Lehmann, 1999, 1:69). And even after the fall, his lectures on first Corinthians explains the women as the glory of man (1 Cor 11:7 NIV), he pointed out that it should be under the commitment of both without any pressure (Pelikan, Oswald and Lehmann, 1999, 13:02). On the other hand, many of those who are outside Germany view Luther's thoughts about women more negatively and separate them from his discussion about marriage (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.7). They support Luther's traditional view considering women as inferior to men by their nature from the creation (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.8, 15).

But in addition to these paradoxes, Luther was himself "self-contradictory" even if he is "never ambiguous" in his view on women (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.8). As a result, "We are left with generalization that cannot be proved" (Susan & Merry, 2003, p.13). These intricacies are some of the main origin of the complexity of the Lutheran theology, especially on women.

#### **2.1.4 MLC contexts**

The complexity of Lutheran teachings affects its theology on women. The above mentioned numerous and contradictory interpretations of Luther's views are amplified by different church contexts. Every context necessitates and has its unique approach to gender justice. Consequently, a contextual methodology is crucial to effective results and achievements on gender justice and women in leadership in the global Lutheran Communion (Elaine Neuenfeldt, 2017, p.1). Women, especially in Africa, need to contextualize the theology based on Luther's doctrines which are steeped in sixteenth-century patriarchal culture to deal with social realities (LWF Women on the Move, 2018, p.26).

In the Malagasy context, men and women are equal before the law. Since 1959, Malagasy women had the right to be elected in any leadership position in the Malagasy constitution (Mami, 2020, p.77). The new ratified Malagasy law 009-2019 about women was supported by the P.N.P.F. (Politique Nationale de Promotion de la Femme) and the PANAGED (Plan National d'Action Genre et Développement) to fight the violence against women (Mami, 2020, p.76). Nonetheless, these theoretical concepts lack efficient implementations, especially in the MLC. Like most of the African women, Malagasy women are expected not to

question injustice nor demand their right but to be silent and to be caretakers of the family (LWF Women on the Move, 2018, p.26).

Therefore, the MLC, unlike many other Malagasy churches that are allowing women either to be ordained or to be elected in any leadership position, still confine women's participation (Mami, 2020, p.77). Most of the leadership positions are kept by ordained men above forty years old. They are the ones who can influence the MLC members in its teaching. Unfortunately, most of them are not promoting gender justice. They are supporting the theological teaching about women's lower position. Most of its members are women and they are mainly involved in voluntary works without any specific criteria only. Consequently, Malagasy women lack confidence and feel inferior when it comes to applying for leadership positions because they also are seen as a test to see if women can manage to lead (LWF Women on the Move, 2018, p.26).

As a conservative church that firmly sets its value in the Lutheran identity, modernizing theology on women needs to be founded in what Luther and his followers taught. Therefore, the LWF GJP does not have authoritative influence. It can simply open the way to a more common and updated teaching that MLC can adopt or skip.

## 2.2 Definition of key terms

### 2.2.1 Gender justice

"Gender justice" is the most important key term of this paper. The following chapter (chapter four), which is dedicated to the analysis of the LWF GJP, will focus on how Lutheran theology on women is biblically founded and theologically grounded to establish gender justice. One of the most important missions of the church and faith-based organizations is to support and re-establish justice in the world.

Therefore, "gender justice" can be defined as the expression of equality and balanced power relations between women and men. "Fairness", "dignity", "equity", "equality" and other related terms are used to demand gender justice and accountability. They are used to eliminate the institutional, cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination (LWF, 2013, p.38). Therefore, it should imply both protection and promotion of the equal dignity of women and men. However, making the personal political is critical because it calls an invocation of moral judgments in societies (Musa, 2004, p.xii). Though, that complicated task is not only biblically based but also a social responsibility. It must be undertaken because justice delayed is justice denied (Musa, 2004, p.4).

### **2.2.2 Sex and gender**

"Sex" is a medical term (Act Alliance, 2017, p.3) that refers to the biological and body determination of category, form and functions between women and men (LWF, 2013, p.39). It is common to individuals in all societies and cultures (Dietrich, 2015, p.3). But with sexual rights, people can freely and responsibly decide on all aspects of their sexuality (Act Alliance, 2017, p.4) whether masculine, feminine or intersex. That may match or not their sex assigned at birth.

"Gender" is the social constructed differences in attributes and opportunities associated with being female or male as well as the social interactions and relationships between women and men. It defines traits forged throughout the history of social relations and goes beyond the physiological and biological specifics of the sexes (Dietrich, 2015, p.3). It also determines what is expected, allowed and valued in women or a men in a given context (LWF, 2013, p.37).

On the other hand, "gender" refers to unequal power relations based on socially constructed norms and practices that are derived from a person's real or perceived sex (Act Alliance, 2017, p.3).

Nonetheless, habitually, the term "gender" is used wrongly as synonymous and interchangeable with the word "women" because gender approaches often focus on women and girls which globally are still facing discrimination and exclusion (Act Alliance, 2017, p.3). The term "sex" is often translated with the same word as "gender" in some languages, like in the Malagasy language (Regis, 1985, p.520; 538; 557; 1021) even if it is not its synonym (Musa, 2004, p. 153).

### **2.2.3 Gender equality, equity and balance**

Based on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, "gender equality" is the equal enjoyment of human rights, opportunities, responsibilities, resources and rewards irrespective of gender or sex, including fundamental freedoms in political, civil, economic, social and cultural fields of life (Act Alliance, 2017, p.3). "Equality" does not mean that women and men are the same but that women's and men's opportunities, rights and responsibilities do not depend on whether they are born female or male. (LWF, 2013, p.37). So, "gender equality" means equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women and men, girls and boys.

In the LWF GJP, "Gender balance" refers to equal representation and participation of men and women (LWF, 2013, p.37).

"Gender equity" is one of the means through which gender equality is reached. It refers to the fair treatment of women, girls, boys, and men according to their respective needs and perspectives (LWF, 2013, p.37). "Women's empowerment" is the process of transforming gender power relations, developing awareness of women's subordination and building their collective capacity to challenge inequality (LWF, 2013, p.37).

## 2.3 Theoretical framework

### 2.3.1 Hermeneutic and ongoing reformation

The LWF GJP was used to bring changes in many LWF member churches. But in this paper, I will focus the analysis on its hermeneutical approach to Lutheran theology on women only. I will mention clearly how the policy supported and rooted gender justice in Lutheran teachings. That can be one of the important basic foundations of efficient advocacy works on gender justice in the MLC. A more positive view of women can be expected once the teaching of the MLC is in line with the basic foundation of Lutheran teachings on women. That is why the hermeneutical approach is relevant in my study.

"Hermeneutic" is from the Greek word "ἑρμηνεύω" which means "to translate" or "to interpret" (Friberg, 2015). It can be defined as the art of proclaiming, translating, explaining and interpreting. "Engaging in hermeneutic is trying grasp the meaning of something or an account of past events" (Zimmermans, 2015, p.2). Similarly, "hermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own" (Thiselton, 2009, p.1). Furthermore, it encompasses "the second-order discipline of asking critically what exactly we are doing when we read, understand, or apply texts. Also, "hermeneutics explores the conditions and criteria that operate to try to ensure responsible, valid, fruitful, or appropriate interpretation" (Thiselton, 2009, p.4). Thus, "hermeneutic" is the reflection on the problem of understanding or the art of understanding by the identification, analysis and removal of the problem of understanding (Alexander, 2007, p.2). Hence, it is not an exact science. It is an ongoing philosophical process.

Since "ongoing reformation" is one of the characteristics of the Lutheran theology, the hermeneutical approach plays a very important role in the Lutheran tradition. "Ongoing reformation" is translated from the Latin phrase "ecclesia semper reformanda est". It can

mean "the church is always reforming" or "the church will always be reformed" by God and led by faith's member (Bellittlo, 2017, p.76). It is both a premise and principle in Lutheran theology that develops Lutheran theology in different contexts (Pedersen, 2010, p.19). Thus, there is no static Lutheran theology. It is interpreted and contextualized from one context to another.

### **2.3.2 The Contextual Hermeneutic**

According to Knut Holter, a teacher of contextual theology at VID Stavanger, there is no common or neutral theology but only contextual theology. For him, all theologies are influenced by their interpreter's hermeneutical approach and understanding. Twenty-first Christian theologians express diverse theology from their different hermeneutical approaches and models (Bevans and Tahaafe-Williams, 2012, p.20). Interpretation is influenced by the author's background.

Also, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, understanding is prejudiced by people's life experience, history, tradition and doctrine (Gadamer, 2004, p.325). Therefore, a contextual hermeneutic attempts to explore how a particular text impacts specific contexts (Musa, 2004, p.x). It is then a methodology that makes any ordinary people and their community and particular context the subject of the interpretation of the Bible through their involvement in the interpretation process (Ogbonnaya, 2019, p.52). Thus, contextual hermeneutics can be defined as the art of proclaiming, translating, explaining, and interpreting texts in the context of our life situation.

Therefore, contextual hermeneutics can be defined as the understanding of biblical interpretation in a particular context (Stephen Lim, 2019, p.70). Thus, it avoids the sometimes-hidden assumption that some notions are defined based on any particular experience, geography, time or any other particular possibilities (Elaine Neuenfeldt, 2017, p.1).

### **2.3.3 The Critical Hermeneutic**

The "hermeneutics of suspicion" which characterized the hermeneutics at the turn of the eighteenth century, is used to describe an act of reading literary text whereby the one who engages in reading a text does not take every claim and proposition for granted by the authors. Rather, the claim, and proposition must be tested "in the light of reason or the evidence of the history" (David, 2004, p.86; 9-10). It means that the motives of others behind the meaning one finds must always be doubted and viewed with skeptical eyes

(Scott-Baumann, 2009, p.7). It is animated by a suspicious attitude towards a given account. It is characterized by a rejection of the respect for the purported authenticity (Partington, 2002, p.13).

Similar to the hermeneutic of suspicion, a critical hermeneutic tends to question a particular perspective (Elaine Neuenfeldt, 2017, p.2). It does not take the self-understanding for granted and tries to disclose the shortcomings (Thomas Teo, 2015, p.47) of one's own prejudices and the prejudices of others (Ormiston and Schrift, 1990, p.22).

### **Summary**

Based on the gender difference, women are often discriminated in society as well as in church daily life. However the sixtieth century church reformation brought change to women's situation, both in the church and in society. Nevertheless, Luther's view on women is interpreted differently because of the ongoing reformation that embolden the contextualization of the theology in the Lutheran tradition.

The definitions of the key terms and the highlight of the theoretical framework in this chapter are important for the main analysis of the LWF GJP. "Gender" and "sex", "justice" and "equality" and related words are very important to be defined before the main analysis of the LWF GJP. Moreover, the definitions of "ongoing reformation", "contextual hermeneutic" and "critical hermeneutic" are relevant for the study.

Nonetheless, information about the LWF and the policy itself will deepen the understanding of the document. That is the context of the next chapter: Presentation of the LWF and the LWF GJP.

### 3 Chapter 3: PRESENTATIONS of the LWF and the LWF GJP

#### **Introduction**

Before the evaluation and the critic of the LWF GJP in the next chapter, it is important to know about the organization that published it, the LWF, to better understand its background. The historical contexts and the process of the publication of the policy itself is crucial for a better understanding of its content. Thus, the focus of this chapter is to strongly link the background of the document to the sections that are related to its presentation.

The presentation of the LWF GJP is divided in three sub-sections. It provides first the biblical foundations of gender justice. From these biblical foundations comes its theological grounds. Finally, I will present the ten principles and methodologies as they appear in the policy.

#### 3.1 Presentation of the LWF

##### **3.1.1 The LWF as a communion of churches**

The LWF is an international faith-based actor accredited by the United Nations Economic and Social Council or UN ECOSOC (LWF Abridged, 2018, p.4). According to its website, it was established in 1947, in the aftermath of the Second World War, to confess, reflect, reconcile, and to respond together to human suffering (<https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/about-lwf>). It now represents over 77 million Christians in 99 countries through 148 churches sharing a common Lutheran heritage.

Rooted in Christ, convinced to be called by God and with passion for the church and the world, the LWF is a communion of churches which commits itself to work together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world (LWF, 2018, p.3). Its holistic mission as the embodiment of God's grace in the world (LWF, 2013, p.20) is to proclaim the gospel and to do diaconal and advocacy work (LWF, 2018, April 2022). The biblical call to uphold justice and the vocation to live and work together in ongoing reformation (semper reformanda) is at the very heart of the LWF's self-understanding (LWF, 2013, p.1). This understanding inspires the organization to be a community in transformative dialogue (LWF, 2013, p.5).

Based on Amos 5:24 "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," LWF values and promotes human dignity and justice because every person is created in the image of God (LWF, 2018, p.5). As a result, promoting human dignity, justice and peace is one of its strategic priorities (LWF, 2018, p.18). Since faith is not an abstract thought, promoting human dignity, justice and peace is part of the church's concrete life for



addressing violence and human suffering that the world is facing today (LWF, 2018, April 2022).

### **3.1.2 LWF constitution and policy**

As an instrument of its autonomous member churches, the LWF decisions taken by the council and the assemblies do not have any hierarchical authority (LWF, 2013, p.10). The communion relationship is independent but there are multiple regional and global centers of decision making and action that connect and bring together its member churches (LWF, 2013, p.21).

For that reason, a LWF policy gives an orientation and expresses its common value and vision (LWF, 2013, p.9) but is not a mandatory policy. Accordingly, the LWF has based its commitment to adopting a gender justice policy on the experiences and engagement of its member churches' united witness to work toward promoting human rights (LWF, 2013, p.20). Thus, the LWF JGP is an invitation to engage in movements of change in relationships and structures in the church, society and life (LWF, 2013, p.15). Consequently, the LWF policy is calling all its member churches to use the gift of communion as a tool to work and engage together in God's mission in the world and the church (LWF, 2018, April 2022). The cultural diversity of the LWF member churches is celebrated as opportunities of shared encounter and mutual challenge and learning. (LWF, 2013, p.21).

### **3.1.3 LWF historic commitment to gender justice**

LWF started to act in accordance with its biblical, theological and practical commitment to gender justice by promoting women's participation over decades (LWF, 2013, p.16). LWF's gender justice journey started from the reading of scripture together. Men and women were created in the image of God (LWF WICAS, 2013). Several resources, embedded in the scriptures and the Lutheran theology and tradition were published by the WICAS to promote men's and women's dignity and equality in God's eyes. Thus, the process of reflection on gender and power was systematized and published in the document entitled "It will not be so among you!" A faith reflection in Gender and Power (LWF, 2010). The gender equality is discussed from the perspective of faith and spelled out as gender justice (LWF, 2013, p.15). Hence, gender justice is an expression of Christian freedom to serve, create and live in an equitable community that cares for each other (LWF, 2013, p.27).

In the decision-making body, the LWF gender justice process was discussed from its establishment. During its second assembly in 1952, a women's section was included. In

1970, the Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk was instituted. From the LWF seventh and following assemblies, a “quota system” of at least forty percent women’s participation at all the LWF levels was committed and reaffirmed. From 1997 gender equality was identified as LWF’s core task (LWF, 2013, p.18). The LWF considers gender justice as an expression of Christian freedom that God promised in the body of Christ in Holy Communion (LWF, 2013, p.26). The 2010 LWF assembly adopted principles of inclusivity and gender policy. LWF ensures equal salaries for its female and male employees (LWF Women & Gender, 2022). The last LWF assembly in 2017 adopted resolutions on gender justice, women in ordained ministry, sex education and sexual and gender-based violence. The LWF Strategy 2019-2024 continues to promote gender justice and the presence of a gender balance at every LWF organizational and activity level (LWF, 2018, p.7).

### 3.2 Presentation of the LWF GJP

The LWF GJP is a forty page document published by the LWF in 2013 in its four official languages (English, French, Spanish and German) and now it is translated and available in more than twenty-five languages like Italian, Arabic, Swahili, Hindi, ... (Elaine Neuenfeldt, 2017, p.4). More translations, like in the Malagasy language are encouraged, supported and are still in process.

The LWF GJP is considered as a very important milestone of the LWF inclusiveness vision (LWF, 2013, p.1). It is a follow up of the publication of the document published in 2002 advocating against violence against women (LWF, 2002). It has been conceptualized in a participatory process that can be contextualized and used in different contexts (LWF, 2013, p.15). The foreword of the LWF General Secretary points out the LWF identity, value and commitment. It defines that long road as a pedagogical journey to gender justice (LWF, 2013, p.2-3). One half of the pages of the publication are dedicated to its Biblical and theological foundations. The most important parts of the publication talk about different methodologies of implementation of the policy. Its aim is to fulfill the LWF holistic mission which is the expression of God’s grace in the world (LWF, 2013, p.20) to ensure the dignity of all.

The LWF GJP is not only a document but more a practical tool to address the structural challenges of the implementation of the full participation of women in different contexts. The policy clearly states that “it is an invitation to engage in movements of change in relationship and structure in the church, society and life” (LWF, 2013, p.15). It provides a

legal framework to work on a clear action plan, process and guidelines to put the gender justice in practice in all LWF levels: international, regional, and national (Elaine Neuenfeldt, 2017, p.4). They are based on theological foundations that are grounded in the Bible and Christian tradition (LWF, 2013, p.23).

### **3.2.1 LWF GJP Biblical Foundations**

The LWF GJP is sustained by its biblical ground because justice is a prophetic announcement (LWF, 2013, p.15). The church is a communion of believers united in Christ. Therefore, the church should provide open spaces for all God's people to be valued in equal status (LWF, 2013, p.32-33). It should offer equal opportunity for men and women to fully participate in its practical life (LWF, 2013, p.32).

In the LWF, the Bible and Lutheran traditions are the lenses through which gender is discussed from the perspective of faith (LWF, 2013, p.15). It is one of its diaconal actions (LWF, 2013, p.20) and services in the inclusive Holy Communion round table (LWF, 2013, p.26). They are founded in biblical texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

#### **3.2.1.1 The Old Testament**

Based on the creation theological relationship, the two creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 are not expressing differences that exist between male and female but between God and creation (LWF, 2013, p.4). Creation depends on God by love. Genesis 1:27 talks about equality of human beings created in the image of God. Male and female share the vocation of stewardship and care of God's ongoing creation. Male and female are different, but both are created in the image of God. So, they are equals. Both depend on God and therefore serve one another (LWF, 2013, p.21).

In Genesis 2:18, the Hebrew word עֲזָרָה translated as "helper" (BDB, 2015) is also used at Psalm 121:1-2 as God's dependability. And in that Psalm, helper is not understood in terms of subordination but as a dependable mutual support (LWF, 2013, p.28). From my previous research, many other bible verses like in Ex. 18:4, 1 Chr. 12:19, Isa. 30:5 translate that same Hebrew word in these mentioned verses as a savior of the one it compounds and they all refer to God (Mami, 2020, 57). Therefore, the woman who is created as the helper of the man is not inferior to him but was created to rescue him from his loneliness and silent world.

### 3.2.1.2 The Gospels

In the Gospels, the ways in which Jesus related to women were open, inclusive, welcoming and restoring (LWF, 2013, p.4). That was not familiar in Jewish community life but he brought that reformation. When Jesus heals the crippled woman in Luke 13:10-17, her full humanity was restored (LWF, 2013, p.21). That is the manifestation of God's grace. That full expression of the grace of God should highlight the reading and the interpretation of the world of God from a perspective of gender. Men and women, in any context, should gain equally from that grace. The history of the workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1–16) is supporting that. God's grace falls equally on all the workers who received equal redemption (LWF, 2013, p.25) without distinction. The human logic or social rule cannot change the miraculous expression of the grace of God to the world.

### 3.2.1.3 The Epistles

As a communion of equals through baptism, the church is called prophetically to announce and practice inclusion of all believers (LWF, 2013, p.4). Children, youth, old men or women can all be baptized. Humanity is not only equal in creation, but also in sin (Rom 3:10, 23). All of them are part of church life and should participate in any of its activity and daily life.

But through God's grace, Romans 5 affirms that all human beings are justified by faith to be freed from that which binds (LWF, 2013, p.24). Male and female are sinners at the same time, but both are fully accepted by God. According to Romans 3:10; 23, we are all simultaneously justified and sinner—simul iustus et peccator (LWF, 2013, p.24). No one is justified before God due to what he or she has done or what he or she is, but only by God's grace (LWF, 2013, p.28).

## **3.2.2 LWF GJP Theological Foundations**

The theological approach proposed in the LWF GJP relies on justice as a fundamental concept of Lutheran identity (LWF, 2013, p.24). However, the LWF GJP also interprets the theological and biblical traditions of gender justice in relation to the theologies of the incarnation, sacraments and diaconal action.

### 3.2.2.1 Fundamental concepts in the Lutheran identity

Three Lutheran interpretative tools and theology are presented in the LWF GJP as practical guidance to mainstream gender justice. These following distinctive body of Lutheran teachings are helpful in the interpretation of the Holy Scripture (LWF, 2013, p.22):

- (1) solo verbo, the Scripture interprets Scripture and the distinction of law and gospel,
- (2) solus Christus and theology of the cross,
- (3) sola gratia, sola fide, the justification by grace through faith and the priesthood of all believers.

The popular reading of Bible texts with marginalized people articulates locally contextual theologies that can provoke change. So, reading the Bible from a contextualized perspective can become a motivation for the marginalized people to see their daily struggles in connection with the biblical stories. It facilitates the deconstruction of ideologies and incarnate justice (LWF, 2013, p.23). Accordingly, interpreting the Bible by distinguishing law and gospel can be a light and strength for the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender justice (LWF, 2013, p.23).

To be justified is to be freed from the human hierarchical and unjust system of the patriarchal traditions and values which dehumanize both men and women. Being justified by faith through grace consider individuals and the church to be simultaneously justified and guilty (LWF, 2013, p.24). Then liberated by God's grace, both are freed from meritocracy and patriarchal traditions and values (LWF, 2013, p.24). Consequently, being guided by the impulse of grace is to affirm that women and men are empowered to resist and engage in actions of transformation to address unjust systems (LWF, 2013, p.24).

The priesthood of all believers means that people are not only set free, but that they are also called by the Holy Spirit to care for freedom to serve, create and live in an equitable community (LWF, 2013, p.26). Therefore, gender justice is an expression of Christian freedom. (LWF, 2013, p.27).

### 3.2.2.2 The Incarnation

God's incarnation in the flesh of a human being in Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:14) is to liberate the people who cries for help (LWF, 2013, p.26). God establishes a deeper relationship with human beings as He did when He liberated Israel from the Egyptian's unjust system in Exodus. Accordingly, Jesus's followers are also called into a new paradigm of God's transformed family system (Mk 3:35). In our day, church is that body of Christ (1 Cor 12:26-27). This is a just community of sisters and brothers engaged in justice in all relationships (LWF, 2013, p.26). Lutheran identity in the "priesthood of all believers" sets all people free and calls each one to care for that freedom in the reign of God (LWF, 2013, p.27).

### 3.2.2.3 The Sacraments

Through baptism and the Eucharist, the church is a discipleship of equals. So, there is unity of genders before God and no one is justified due to anything else but only by God's grace (LWF, 2013, p.27). Men and women are both freed to serve at an inclusive and round table because Jesus shared it with everybody (Gal 3:26-28, 1 Cor 12:13). Every person is important, invited to share bread and wine at the same table and gifted differently by the Holy Spirit to serve in the same church (LWF, 2013, p.26). Paul's instruction that women should be silent in the congregation's meeting (1 Cor 14:34) is driven by the context of the tongue speakers as seen in 1 Cor 14:28 (LWF, 2013, p.28). Therefore, it cannot be understood as a universal rule because he approved women to speak publicly in meeting (1 Cor 11:5). The contextualization of the interpretation of many biblical texts, that take gender hierarchy for granted, need to be critically reviewed (LWF, 2013, p.28).

### 3.2.2.4 Diaconal action

Theological reflections are relevant when they are associated with actions. Diaconal work is the church's missiological understanding of being sent into the world (LWF, 2013, p.20). It allows churches to position themselves in the public space (LWF, 2013, p.19).

Accordingly, the LWF based its commitment to advocate for gender justice as a spiral movement collecting all its member church experiences and systematize them at the communion's level. It reflects a more comprehensive approach grounded in theological concepts and based on a social and cultural construction of how to bring and allow women to fully participate in the church's life.

## **3.2.3 LWF GJP principles and methodologies**

### 3.2.3.1 Principles

The LWF GJP has ten principles. It appears in the documents exactly as follow (LWF, 2013, p.13):

1. Promote gender justice as a theological foundation to proclaim dignity and justice for all human beings and to promote gender equality as a universally recognized human right
2. Uphold values of dignity and justice, inclusiveness and participation, mutual accountability and transparency reflecting respect for all people's gifts

3. Apply at regional and local levels the LWF assembly and council decisions regarding inclusiveness and gender and generational balance, ensuring the equal representation and participation of women and men at all levels in decision-making positions
4. Ensure gender analysis in all humanitarian and development work and intentionally address gender equality in order to reinforce patterns of justice and inclusiveness. For this reason, it is essential to recognize and analyze the effects of all development processes on gender equality.
5. Support the empowerment of women as a key strategy toward ending the unequal distribution of wealth and conflict and preventing and responding to gender-based violence.
6. Actively promote the involvement of men reflecting on models of transformed masculinities engaged in gender justice.
7. Address systemic and structural practices that create barriers to the full participation of women in leadership and at levels of decision making
8. Ensure that key organizational policies, systems, practices, budgets, human resource management, staffing, representation, training, management and decision-making bodies are gender balanced and support the equal participation of women and men
9. Ensure that gender analysis is built into all programs and stages of project cycles: assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
10. Engage all aspects of theology, liturgy and devotional life from the perspective of gender justice.

These principles are the expression of the LWF commitment to actively promote and uphold the values of dignity and justice. They support and ensure the engagement and the application of gender equality in the whole church and society's practical life. Men and women should inclusively participate with mutual responsibility. Women ought to be empowered and men are to be involved and engaged.

Gender equality is not only considered a theological proclamation of dignity and justice but also recognized as a worldwide human right. It has to be real and practiced both in the church's liturgical and devotional life as well as in all society's systems, organizations, policies, and activities, up to its leadership and decision-making levels.

### 3.2.3.2 Methodology

The three steps of LWF GJP methodology are the guideline for a pedagogical approach of the ten principles (LWF, 2013, p.14).

The first step is the process of observation. It is about building awareness and knowledge related to gender justice. It starts by the observation of the realities in the communion and in member churches different contexts, communities and concerned individuals (LWF, 2013, p.15). Analyzing the reality by asking questions and discerningly understanding the contexts helps to conceptualize the principles defined in the policy (LWF, 2013, p.15).

The second step is a theological reflection in dialogue with a human rights perspective (LWF, 2013, p.15). The biblical and the theological foundations are used to judge and discern the result of the first process. Justice is the prophetic announcement and the starting point of gender equality that ensures the dignity of all (LWF, 2013, p.15). That fundamental theological concept in Lutheran identity is the basis of the discussion and highlight of the process.

The final step is the implementation. After the observation and the discernment, each specific context needs corresponding actions (LWF, 2013, p.14). The policy provides a guidance for the implementation in a participatory process (LWF, 2013, p.15). The achievement of gender justice is the final outcome and result. Therefore, the document suggests but does not prescribe (LWF, 2013, p.29) seven practical tools for conceptualized action plans (LWF, 2013, p.15):

- (1) Contextual assessment
- (2) Participatory approach
- (3) Cross cutting gender justice
- (4) Capacity development
- (5) Organizational arrangement
- (6) Safe places and healing communities
- (7) Systems and mechanisms of mutual accountability

## **Summary**



God's grace liberated His people to serve in an inclusive church and world. The Holy Spirit empowers the church to make justice visible (LWF, 2013, p.26). Gender justice is an expression of Christian freedom in the visible church (LWF, 2013, p.27). Men and women, who are equals through baptism and the Eucharist, are freed to serve in the same church.

The LWF is a communion of churches that is leading all its member churches to act toward gender justice for decades. It has published a policy that explains the biblical and the theological foundations of gender justice. The ten principles of the policy are not only a document but a strong call for action with clear guidelines and practical tools to implement it from the LWF international level to the local churches different contexts. Strongly supported by the ongoing reformation of the Lutheran theology, gender justice is included in Lutheran identity.

## 4 Chapter 4: DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL EVALUATION

### Introduction

This chapter will discuss how the biblical grounds of the Lutheran theology are interpreted by the LWF as the foundation of its gender justice policy. As a faith-based organization, the advocacy for justice is not only grounded on the women's human right but also in its Christian and Gospel values. Both according to the theology of the creation and the Lutheran theology of the cross, human dignity and the equality of men and women are granted by grace. All Christians are called to put their faith both into preaching and practical diaconal action against all form of injustice.

However, the approach that the church is using to re-establish that divine creation is very important for the effectiveness of its result in this corrupted world. Thus, the method used by the LWF to present the policy is significant for an operational implementation in different contexts of member churches. That makes the discussion and the evaluation of this chapter essential. I will report some of the implementation of the LWF GJP in its member churches, as published in its website. The policy has been implemented differently in different contexts. The sharing of its effective exercises will strengthen its transformative power. It can also serve as a guide to other churches that are in the implementation process. These report will highlight the limitation of the document.

Finally this chapter will study the hermeneutical model that the LWF GJP offers to promote gender justice. It is important to distinguish the differences between the foundation, elaboration and the implementation approaches. They are the "ongoing reformation", the "critical hermeneutic" and the "contextual hermeneutic".

### 4.1 Implementation of the LWF GJP

The implementation of the LWF GJP was diverse in different contexts. At the global level, the LWF continue to send delegations to attend seminars and meetings to learn and share good experiences and results about gender justice in different platforms, such as the UN sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (María, 2015). They are advocating with government delegations and taking part in many public events in collaboration with ecumenical and interfaith partners (LWI, Geneva March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021). In addition to that, the LWF continue to plan strategies to promote gender justice throughout the global Lutheran churches by its decision-making bodies and executive members. It continues implementing measures that promote justice and dignity to achieve equality between women and men to

all its member churches' organizational level: international, regional and national. Those reports are many, but below are some illustrations by regions.

#### **4.1.1 In Africa**

In Africa, patriarchal mentalities, practices and structures persist both in the church and the society. Thus, the rights of women and children are neglected. Actions of male domination are still practiced in Christian's family homes, communities, churches and nations in Africa. Even if the LWF member churches in Africa adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to integrate goals pertinent to poverty, education, health and gender equality into their respective diaconal services, gender justice is not prioritized compared to the other urgent issues. Whereas it is evident that the churches in Africa want to be agents of transformation. Unfortunately, it is conceivable that they have themselves not been transformed regarding gender issues according to the observation of how they are considering women.

However, workshops to increase capacity and strengthen networking among African theologians in the LWF was led in 2014 to present the LWF GJP (LWI, Africa 2014). The objective of the workshops was to improve the participant's ability to carry out biblical interpretation and gender justice analysis learned by contextual realities. Since the church plays a significant advocacy role in Africa, church leader's voices in gender justice are very important to bring change to the church life and the African society. Their words are received and taken as voices of their respective churches, in some instance considered as God's commandment. Hence, one of the church leader who attended the workshop said "seeking for justice and righteousness is a way of worshiping God" (LWI, Addis Ababa 2014). Afterward, all the LWF member churches in Africa accepted the LWF GJP as a tool to be used for gender justice in one of their regional meeting, as confirmed by the LWF Regional secretary for Africa. As a result, three LWF member churches in Africa translated the LWF GJP into their local languages. Those are the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zimbabwe (ELCZ), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). The other churches used the French and English version to introduce it during their meetings and seminaries. Some churches, as the Malagasy Lutheran Church, are still in the translation process.

Nevertheless, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zimbabwe (ELCZ) offered its translated version as a resource for others. She has established partnerships with the government, the

police, the legal profession, village leaders and many other organizations. They worked together to stop violence against women, stop child marriages and encourage girls to stay in the education system (LWI, Geneva 2020). Since child marriage, polygamy and violence against women have always been critical problems in the country, the church was the first to establish a gender justice desk in 2012. The aim of the policy was to change people's comportment by "raising awareness about the health, psychological and physical risks and harm of these practices" (LWI, Harare 2016). In addition to these practices, men are socialized by the society to see themselves as superior to women. Therefore, the ELCZ used the LWF GJP to hold gender justice training sessions in several of its congregations in remote villages and in their schools. Her aim is to educate that "men and women are created equal as human beings and both genders should be accorded equal opportunities" (LWI, Harare 2016). Seen as successful, the policy received support from the Zimbabwe government. It is used to introduce gender justice into a new curriculum for primary and secondary schools throughout the whole country. Thus, other church denominations and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches also were interested.

Afterward, the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) publicized its commitment against sexual violence through the "Thursdays in Black" campaign (LWI, Liberia 2018). "Thursday in Black" is a global campaign, started by the World Council of Churches (WCC) as a form of peaceful protest against rape and violence (WCC, 2013). The movement influences several churches and ecumenical initiatives. WCC encourage the wearing of black clothes on Thursday to declare the resisting attitudes to rape, show respect for the affected people and encourage others to join the movement (WCC, 2022). Hence, to restore the human dignity, the LCL starts the "Thursday in black" activities with a chapel service. Then a discussion on how to end violence against women and girls and stand in solidarity with them follows the program.

In the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) women being ordained are sometimes seen as a threat and should not be given church roles (LWI, Nairobi 2019). Thus, the KELC gender justice program campaigns to makes sure that every group within the church is listened to and given room to share ideas and participate to all level of the church's hierarchy. The focus of their advocacy program is on the biblical and theological foundation of the gender justice. The biblical approach tries to change the mind-sets of people to allow them to accept equitable leadership for men and women. As a result, cultural barriers are not of strong influence anymore.

To sum up, three of the thirty-one LWF member churches in Africa have translated the LWF GJP in their local language. The others which can use the Swahili, French and English versions of the document are not having specific agenda to discuss about it. However, some are in their translation process. Thus, these above mentioned implementation processes are bringing changes in their church and their society. In addition, gender equality is still one of the LWF cross-cutting priorities. Therefore, the issue of gender should remain in the agenda of the LWF programs in the Africa region.

#### **4.1.2 In Asia**

Similar to Africa, Asia has strong cultural patriarchal attitude towards women. Thus, unequal opportunities in employment and payment, early marriages, discrimination, abuse and violence against women remain key challenges in many Asian countries. The Indian government statistics show that reported cases of sexual violence are on the rise, with an average of ninety-two women being raped every day in India (LWI, Geneva December 2019).

Consequently, it is necessary to change not only these compartments but also the laws to establish equal treatment of men and women in many Asian countries. However, finding a way to highlight gender justice in a context where ancient practices are still highly valued may be a challenge (LWI, Kuala Lumpur 2014). Therefore, to introduce the LWF GJP, “Pastors and other church leaders need to do power analysis in their own church context” (LWI, Pematang Siantar 2019). In addition to that, as stated by an Asian woman theologian “the transformational dimension of the Gospel, which offers a provision for gender justice, will enhance the possibilities for implementation of the LWF GJP”. Thus, female theologians also need “a more practical approach and discussion about gender justice with male theologians” (LWI, Kuala Lumpur 2014).

In the Middle East, every religious community has the right to deal with the organization of its members’ family life. Hence, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) adopted the LWF GJP for their Ecclesial Court of to include equal recognition of men and women on family-related issues (LWI, Jerusalem 2015). Thus, the launch of the Arabic version of the LWF GJP by the ELCJHL makes it accessible in Palestinian everyday language and interpretation of theological perspectives. It is confirmed that the ELCJHL was the first and the only church in the Middle East which applied such a policy (LWI, Bethlehem 2016). The policy defines theological processes and practices to help promoting just relations between men and women and enhance women’s contribution to both church and society

(LWI, Bethlehem 2016). The prophetic role of the church raised awareness about the dignity of all, which is against the traditional conservative voice of the society. Through several workshops, trainings, educational institutions and program, the ELCJHL includes the gender awareness in school curricula and other training programs. Church leaders continue to lead theological discussions on the gender justice in their context and raise awareness about the rights of women and girls.

However, in many other Asian churches, presenting the LWF GJP was not an easy task. It might be easier in the ELCJHL because the LWF President was a powerful man who has authoritative voice in their church. He highly recommended the introduction of the policy in his church and his country. Therefore, his position and gender as male pastor contributed a lot in the implementation and discussion process, both for the male leaders in the church and his society.

Nevertheless, in the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC), women ordination is not allowed and there are still women who are against it (Narita, 2015). It has been reported that for some people who haven't heard the notion of gender justice, the topic may sound aggressive. Therefore, the LWF GJP is translated into Japanese and used as a tool to discuss the situation of gender injustice in their church and society. With some pictures and examples, women in the JELC try to explain that men and women are made equal. They also hope that it will open the door to women ordination in their church.

Similarly, it was reported that introducing the gender justice policy in the twelve United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI) as well as the work of the LWF national Committee in Indonesia was a long and painstaking work that needed a lot of patience. In the beginning, it was affirmed that church leaders in the UELCI said: "GJP is foreign policy – it's not for our church." (LWI, Pematang Siantar 2019). Thus, the LWF General Secretary encouraged the UELCI to offer witness, rooted in faith, to preach and teach the God-given dignity and equal power to women and men.

Nevertheless, advocacy works have been started in Indonesia. The Indonesian Christian Church called Huria Kristen Indonesia (HKI) provides training for pastors in gender justice (LWI, Pematang Siantar 2019). Women from the Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia (GKPI) gathered to hear about ways of implementing the LWF's Gender Justice Policy in their own local context (LWI, Paris 2021). Through dialogue, the Christ Lutheran Church (CLC) adopted the policy.

Nonetheless, in some churches, like in Myanmar, the transformation process of the church's gender and protection programs is mobilizing men and boys. From the raising of awareness to the discussion, action and accountability, males are involved to work for a more just an equal world (LWI, Myanmar 2019).

From these examples, we comprehend that the implementation of the LWF GJP in Asia was led from its grassroots level. One of the trainer stated "trainings aim to equip participants with skills and resources to conduct gender justice advocacy from the local level to global level and back to their local context" (LWI, Geneva Switzerland November 2020).

#### **4.1.3 In Americas**

The LWF has nineteen member churches in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region and two churches in the North America region. These two LWF regional expressions have a common LWF regional secretary, meetings and conferences where they discuss their agenda on the implementation of the LWF GJP. Based on theological reflection and a better understanding of local contexts, they carry on activities to strengthen gender equality. In these two LWF regions in America, women leaders and women theologians started their work on women empowerment before the approval of the LWF GJP document. All the LWF member churches in these two regions ordain women. Nonetheless, a survey published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) showed that "women serving as pastors and deacons still earn around eighty percent of what men earn" (LWI, Warsaw 2019).

The LAC built up a network called "Women and Gender Justice" to enhance inclusive, sustainable and hospitable communities within the church and in the local settings (Mathies, 2012). The network serves as a platform to reinforce discussion on the role of women in the church and society. Nonetheless, they pointed out that women don't want to compete but want to have the same opportunities and help to build a united, creative, lively and joyful church together with men (Mathies, 2012). Their following meetings encouraged women participation in church and in theological research by sharing their experiences (LWF, 2005) and stories (LWI, São Leopoldo 2013) with the North America region, through the Leadership Conference of the Americas and other meetings (LWI, Lima 2019).

Accordingly, the network serves as a tool to support and make a reality the LWF GJP in the region. One of the main tasks is to make church leaders understand that the struggle for equal rights for women and men in church and society is not uniquely the concern of women but of the whole church (LWI, Paramaribo, Suriname 2016).

One example of the implementation process is in the Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala (ILAG). She has a boarding school which equip young women with both formal education and technical life skills. With the conviction that "change of attitude could lead to change in policy" (LWI, Switzerland, 2021), the teaching is the first step to transform people's behavior toward gender justice. Hence, the LWF trained some trainers on the use of certain words and languages that affects advocacy on women's right. Thus, as a prophetic voices, faith-based actors should use the language about God and about men and women to create power dynamic in church and society. Therefore, the training considered the language as an advocacy tool that need to be used within its context.

To sum up, gender justice is not the most challenging issue in the American Lutheran churches. The church's greatest challenge is focused on the political, social and economic instability in the countries (LWI, Buenos Aires, Argentina 2018). However, the sharing of their good experiences serve as an effective tool and learning model to give hope to the other LWF member churches who are still challenging in the issue of gender-based injustice.

#### **4.1.4 In Europe**

The statistical survey of Lutheran World Federation membership worldwide show that more than half of its members are in European countries (LWF, Statistic 2022). According to its website, there are three regional expressions of the LWF in Europe: Central Eastern, Central Western and Nordic countries (LWF, Region 2022).

However, it is obvious that in Europe, Lutheran women have reached top levels of leadership in their churches. The socio-cultural context and laws in Europe affected positively better women conditions in their churches. They adopted their own constitutions which they modeled on state legislation. Therefore, it is stated that "many churches have adapted the LWF GJP to their respective national or local contexts, drawing up their own documents based on its ten principles and accompanying methodology" (LWI, Warsaw 2019).

Nonetheless, it is also indicated that women still "face the challenges of a patriarchal mind set" (LWI, Geneva 2019). Some churches have ordained women in ministry for many years but then questioning or even overturning previous governing body decisions and interdict women ordination based on apostolic tradition (Christa, 2016). One of them is the Lutheran Church in Latvia.

Thus, the LWF GJP is used as a guide and a source of information to amend internal church law for achieving greater justice. Regional meetings and networks like the "LWF women's



network in Europe” serve to discuss the LWF GJP with church leaders and congregations to give more attention to theological work on gender justice (LWF, 2014). Coaching programs, such as the one called “Woman to Woman” allow women with leadership experience to pass on their knowledge to younger women (LWI, Hanover, 2018).

In churches which did not used to ordain women such as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (ECAC) in Poland, its translated version in the local language served as a tool to advocate for it. Thus, the synod of the ECAC voted to allow women’s ordination and has ordained the first nine female pastors in Mai 2022 (Hitchen, 2022).

Formerly, the Union of Protestant churches of Alsace and Lorraine (UEPAL) examined their own structures and realities in terms of gender justice to ensure its implementation and accountability. Thus, the Lutheran Church of Alsace, one of its member churches, adopted a gender and youth quota according to the recommendations of the LWF. The requirement is at least 40 percent women, 40 percent men and 20 percent youth and young adults who are 30 years old or younger in each decision-making body (LWI, Strasbourg 2018). Most of the LWF member churches in the northern countries adopted that LWF recommendation in their policies (LWI, Hanover 2019).

Even though most of the inhabitants in the European countries understand English, it is stated that not everyone understand it (LWI, Helsinki 2015). So, many European churches also translated the LWF GJP into their local language. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) was the first which translated it into their mother tongue to allow it to speak to them and about them and to raise new questions related to their own specific contexts (LWI, Helsinki 2015).

## **4.2 Discussion on the implementation of the LWF GJP**

### **4.2.1 Approaches of implementation**

Corresponding to the diversity of contexts in the LWF member churches, there is a diversity of implementation and use of the LWF GJP in different backgrounds.

In the European and American churches, where gender equality is not considered as a challenging issue in the society, it is easier to explain the principle of inclusiveness. Churches can pledge to step up efforts to value the equal dignity of every person created in the image and likeness of God, both in the church and the society. Churches had different spheres of influences such as sermons, seminaries, universities or other professional spheres and even

public spaces to present and explain the LWF GJP (LWI, Warsaw 2018). Therefore, the LWF GJP was used as a model to develop church's contextualized gender policy and strengthen women participation.

On the other hand, in most of the Asian and African societies bound by the patriarchal system, women are made to feel shame, doubt, or unworthy if they fail to conform to the traditional gender stereotypes that consider them as lower than men. In addition to that, as mostly challenged by poverty, other approaches are used to discuss about gender equality. Women's empowerment is considered as a key to fight against poverty.

Girls constrained by the poverty cannot have the same right as boys, who are prioritized by their parents to go to school, if they have to choose among them. Uneducated woman who become a mother in her child age cannot easily improve their children's education. Early marriage, pregnancy, harmful practices, sexual and other diseases, gender-based violence are often related to poverty. Some parents feel obliged to marry their daughter early and follow the social harmful practices because of their dependency of social systems which can support them in their challenging financial situation. Thus, the circle of poverty continues and cannot open African and Asian churches to prioritize other issues like the gender equality in their agenda.

In addition, Rev. Dr. Elieshi Mungure, the LWF Regional Secretary for the Africa region noted that the churches in Africa do not have policy in their constitution. Therefore, bringing the LWF GJP in the African church leadership table of discussion and decision-making as a document to be accepted might lead to confrontation to the majority male leaders and the system. Thus, the document was presented as a tool to make the church understand what gender equality and justice is, what their biblical and theological basis are and how to use it to build a participatory leadership in the church. Then the churches are encouraged to have their own gender justice approach and document according to their own words and responding to their needs through context analysis.

However, the LWF GJP was presented indirectly throughout biblical studies and discussions during many LWF programs and workshops in Africa and Asia. As an example, during the LWF Africa Regional Advocacy Training Workshop in the Lutheran Centre, ECD Dar es salaam, Tanzania, from 9th to 14th October 2017, the theme was "Gender and Child Rights focusing on Education & Health". Nevertheless, one of the presentations during the workshop was about "Theology for Gender Justice and Child Rights".

#### **4.2.2 Implementation in the Malagasy Lutheran Church**

Right after the LWF council meeting in 2013 that adopted the LWF GJP in the global level, the MLC received the information at its national level. I was one of the MLC representatives who attended the LWF council meeting and did the report to the MLC national committee meeting. Thus, the MLC was aware of the document, even though I observed that the report did not lead to any considerations or feedback by the committee members who received it. Afterward, a Malagasy female theologian, Toromaree Mananato, attended the LWF Africa region workshops where the LWF GJP was presented at the regional level. The president of the MLC and representatives also were present when all the African church leaders adopted the document at the regional level. Thus, in theory, the MLC has adopted the document.

Hence, the decision to translate the LWF GJP in the Malagasy language was decided since 2015. The women department of the MLC took the responsibility and started the translation process. However, due to different changes of leaders through elections in the church, the progression took longer time. In addition to that, the Malagasy words related to “gender”, “sex” and many technical and theological words in the LWF GJP document needed discussion for its contextual translation and reading. Therefore, more than two different female theologians volunteered to do the translation. Then, the MLC female theologian association leaders needed to combine and to find the appropriate translation before its final proof reading by an academic Malagasy language professor. However, it is confirmed that the translation process is now in its final procedure and the printing might follow soon this year with financial support of the MLC partner, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The MLC headquarters accepted to give the foreword of the document, by the MLC president, since the translation is not considered as the women desk or the women theologian’s initiative but the MLC as a church’s project. It is important to point that out, as confirmed by a female theologian, who was involved in the translation process but did not want me to mention her name. The MLC, as an LWF active member church was convinced of the need of the document and did the translation. The women desk and the women theologian association leadership are appointed by the women desk and the MLC leadership to lead the work on behalf of them.

Consequently, the plan of implementation is not to change the MLC constitution and policy with the translated document. The MLC women theologian association, with its gender justice program, will promote the document within the MLC. They will share hand copy and will introduce its contents to the church leadership members. The implementation plan in its

“grassroots level” is to train volunteers who can promote and explain the content of the policy, according to the Malagasy context. These trained volunteers will teach how men and women, boys and girls, created equally as image of God, should respect each other at home, in church and in the society. Reading is not part of the Malagasy culture and the educational system. Consequently, these volunteers will use seminaries, church and social meetings and different platforms to raise awareness and discuss about gender and justice. That is why, the study of the hermeneutical model presented in the LWF GJP that will follow in the next chapter, is also relevant.

However, in memory of Ralivao Héléne’s senseless killing, after having been raped, the LWF recognized a witness and a call to “recommit to a firm NO to violence against women” (LWI, Antananarivo 2020). Ralivao Helene was one of the first women who studied theology in the MLC. Her "silenced voice" fighting violence against women, both at the national, regional and global level of the LWF during her life was transformed to “Héléne Ralivao Fund” after her death in 2020. The LWF asserts that “the funds will provide scholarships for women studying theology in the LWF African region and coordinate research and resource development on issues related to the intersection between theology, gender and leadership” (LWI, Geneva Switzerland 2021). In a context where the majority of church leaders in Africa are men, the program targets to “promote structural change, building capacity to advance women’s rights.” (LWI, Tanzania 2021). It aims to “bring to light the barriers that prevent women from participating in God’s church where all, male and female, are called to serve together and exercise leadership with dignity and power” (LWI, Geneva Switzerland 2021). Similar to many African countries, Malagasy women are encouraged to remain in the culture of “silence” and “submission,” which means that women who do dare to speak out “can be rejected by their superiors or by their communities.” (LWI, Geneva April 2021). Thus, even the trained MLC female theologians are often unwilling to speak openly about the hardships they face in their family, church and society. In addition to the facing of rare employment opportunities as theologians in the church, it is more difficult outside the church. That unemployed status worsens the power of silence in the women theologian in the MLC. Thus, the LWF GJP should be used to speak against that.

#### **4.2.3 Critical evaluation of the LWF GJP**

I can consider the LWF GJP as a well-organized document. The participatory processes, both in the making and the implementation of the LWF GJP shows that it can be carried out in different contexts. Before it presents its ten principles and methodologies, it explains the

LWF “walk together toward gender justice” and its biblical foundations. Thus, the way its content is presented is convincing and clear. Nonetheless, there is a risk that such a document and policy is considered as imposed from above. Even though the LWF has always focused on global and local ownership of each one of its member churches, the policy can wrongly be considered as an authoritative document that all its member are forced to implement. Thus, it would be better if there was a paragraph that explains clearly what is a policy and its role in the LWF. That unclearness might lead to an appropriate use of the policy, both for those who want to force its implementation in their local context and those who want to reject all its content.

With its policy, the LWF tries to change its member churches would view on women's participation in the life of the church based on theological arguments, not only on political or social contexts that they are discriminating women. Therefore, the LWF challenges the churches which claim themselves conservatives by denying women full participation and ordination of women to be "faithful to what the Scripture says". By involving both men and women local theologians and church leaders in their program and workshops on gender justice, they call for contextual study for an appropriate implementation of gender equality in their respective contexts. However, for some churches that are against equal participation of men and women, that strong position of the LWF might not motivate them even to read the document. That LWF official standpoint promoting women participation might intimate some people to judge the LWF approach as already defined by its commitment to promote gender equality and women participation. That might blind the eyes of those who are against it to reject all the biblical and theological argumentations presented in the document. Thus, it is also recommended not to point out that strong position, especially in the beginning of the document. A neutral interpretation would be better received. Presenting the document as a policy might hide the strong hermeneutical content of the document.

The third remark that I observed from the document and its implementation process reported from member churches is the lack of clear manual on how to use and implement the policy's principle in specific contexts. It is encouraged and repeatedly told in the document but without a clear practical guideline and example. The document highlight that God created men and women, equally, in His image and likeness. However, the document does not present clear instruction on how to discuss about that, especially to change the churches position against women unequal participation to men at all the church life. It

should give examples of discussion and hermeneutical tools to start and handle the dialogue and the contextualization processes. I observed that the document gives more practical explanations related to the human right and justice rather than its biblical and theological practical tools. And as a church organization, I would expect the LWF to focus more on that. The other lay organization are already handling that part intensely. That is why the next chapter of this paper is helpful. It will study how these hermeneutical approaches are developed and can be implemented.

#### 4.3 Study of the hermeneutical approaches in the LWF GJP

##### 4.3.1 Ongoing reformation

The foundation of the Lutheran hermeneutic is considering the "sola scriptura" as "norma normans" and the "solus Christus" as "hermeneutical key". The Lutheran interpretation of "Sola Scriptura" is giving the highest and indisputable authority of the biblical truth above all interpretations, traditions, structures or different contexts of the church (Burger, 2017, p.8). These human situations can alter over circumstances. Only the truth about the word of God cannot be amended. Bible is the "sole teaching authority" (Bender, 2019, p.122). Just as Christ alone is Lord, Scripture alone is the lord of all ecclesial dogma, tradition, interpretation and life (Bender, 2019, p.122).

However, the post-modern hermeneutists understood that there is an infinite characters of interpretation (Jonas et al., 2008, p.58). Thus, by deconstructing biblical texts, the post-modern hermeneutical method must consider the other concerns around the texts. That include the languages and grammar rules, philosophy and psychoanalysis, politics and ethics, responsibility and justice, law and democracy ... of its original contexts (Nicholas, 2003, p.1). Nevertheless, the Lutheran hermeneutical key is centered in "solus Christus", which is the Christological interpretation of all its theology. Christ alone is the inalienable object of the believer's faith (Bender, 2019, p.113). We are justified by faith in Christ alone, apart from the Law or works of any kind (Bender, 2019, p.114). Christ is the center of the content of Scripture and the only revelatory and teaching authority to Scripture (Bender, 2019, p.122). Therefore, justification is divinely offered in Christ (Bender, 2019, p.116).

These Lutheran theology are deeply and mutually implicated to the theology of "priesthood of all believers". Therefore, that open its theology for update and contextualization. It is strongly rooted on the creation of all human beings with the same dignity. Therefore, there is not structural hierarchy concerning those who can interpret the Bible. Each individual is at

the same level in the eyes of God. Men and women sinned together but both are saved at the same time. Christ's salvation work brought the proper ordering of divine and human relations and activities (Bender, 2019, p.125). Therefore, men and women can receive the Holy Spirit through gift of baptism.

Lutheran churches which claim to be conservative sometimes think that the hermeneutics that reform Lutheran theology is against the Lutheran orthodoxies. However, hermeneutic can avoid both fundamentalism and relativism (Zimmermans, 2015, p.16). Considering tradition help to understand the previous understanding and contexts of how Luther and his followers interpreted the Bible in their contexts. Nonetheless, their theology were strongly related to the sixtieth century world and church's life, which is totally different from the twenty-first century evangelical churches. They primarily turned around the medieval sacramental system, the supreme authoritative claims of the papal hierarchy and the excommunication ... Thus, contextual interpretation of their works, especially those about women, are relevant.

Accordingly, the biblical foundations of gender equality in the LWF GJP is founded in biblical texts that are interpreted by biblical texts. The quest for justice is grounded in the salvation work of Christ that restored the corrupted world and its patriarchal system that discriminates women. As did Jesus, the church has to be radical to achieve the dignity of all human being. Jesus lifted up and defended those with the least power in his society, including women in the Jewish society. Luther also did so.

Nevertheless, the LWF GJP mentioned some wrong understanding of "Sola Scriptura". There are churches that justify oppression, violence and discrimination against women by selecting part and selective passages of Bible literary (LWF, 2013, p.28). Some of Luther's work also are used to support these non-Christian practices. However, the LWF is combating inequality founded in the theology of the creation of men and women in the image of God.

Thus, the LWF GJP is reforming these interpretation of the Lutheran theology on women. Advocacy and commitment to promote gender equality is not women's issue. The humanity desired by the Creator is one, just as God's triune identity is one. However, "unity does not mean uniformity, but difference does not have to mean inequality." (LWI, Strasbourg 2018).

Hence, establishing gender equality requires coordinated efforts by men and women to confront patriarchal prejudices and cultural stereotyping. Thus, the LWF is equipping churches with spiritual and scriptural resources to correct the power dynamics and socio-

cultural norms which relegate women to inferior positions in both church and society by its policy (LWI, Paris 2021)

Therefore, the ongoing reformation which try to always update Lutheran theology according to contexts are employed. As stated a professor in Theology, Rev. Dr. Kjell Nordstokke, Luther himself was a master of contextual theology. Accordingly, the LWF “calls upon its member churches to continue to preach, teach, and serve to work towards gender just communities, where all women and men can flourish” (LWI, 2020). Therefore, Lutheran churches in ongoing reformation are characterized by churches that can drive change in itself and in the society by promoting hope, meaning and a sense of togetherness (LWI, Switzerland 2022).

#### **4.3.2 Critical hermeneutic**

The enlightenment thinkers consider the tradition as the opposite of the critical thinking and tend to reject it. However, tradition and previous interpretation are very important in hermeneutical studies. They help to understand the earlier author and interpreter’s first understanding and original contexts (Zimmermann, 2022, May 12). Therefore, critical hermeneutic analyzes the content of texts by studying its contexts. However, previous theological interpretation, biblically grounded may serve a tools to criticize biblical texts.

Moreover, there are different approaches of studying biblical texts. Scholars classify them in a different ways. There basic tool of questioning the Old Testament texts is reading them in the light of Christ as its fulfillment (Carlos, 2021, p.89). Moreover, there are different techniques of reading the New Testament. The synchronic reading works on its linguistic, syntactic, grammatical, semantic and structural features (Egger, 1966, p.70—74; 85—93; 104). The diachronic reading criticizes the relational, literary, redaction and traditional critics of the texts (Egger, 1996, p.156; 164—168; 179—184). The reading historically analyzes the history’s context (Egger, 1996, p.192—194). The reading hermeneutically tries to understand its content after have done these previous analytical processes (Egger, 1996, p.201—203). The final step of hermeneutical reading is actualizing the texts to the present context (Egger, 1996, p.206—212).

Accordingly, the LWF GJP starts from most of these above mentions hermeneutical steps. Based on the history of the creation, the definition of the Hebrew word עֵצָה in Genesis 2:18 is redefined from other biblical texts from Ex. 18:4, 1 Chr. 12:19 and Isa. 30:5 (LWF, 2013, p.28). That interpretation of the Scripture from the Scripture is the basic foundation of the



critical hermeneutic that the LWF GJP use. Then follow the interpretation of the word from its distinctive paragraph, chapter and the whole books to clarify its meaning. The critical analysis does not begin from each different contexts. Either, it started from the analysis of the use of the same Hebrew word.

Afterward, it tries to question the interpretations of the Bible that lead to injustice towards women. The antiquated ideas of purity laws that still consider women to be "impure" during menstruation are explained in the context of the Old Testament laws. The act of barring women from receiving or distributing Holy Communion during that period is criticized by the New Testament story when Jesus healed the bleeding woman in Luke 8:43-48. The LWF contextualizes and criticizes biblical hermeneutics that discriminate women by the theology of the "Grace alone". Human efforts are excluded from all proper matters of divine salvation (Bender, 2019, p.126). Through faith in Jesus' salvation work done in the cross, everybody can be saved. Therefore, as defined in previous chapter, anybody can chose his or her sex at birth. It is given by grace as God's creation. Even if people can now change their sex or gender with the medical progress, anybody can change it from the mother's belly. The LWF campaigns and webinars and training sessions based on the previous hermeneutical approach. That shows that the LWF GJP use the theological anthropology and the doctrine of the incarnation, reflecting on men and women's equality through the Lutheran lens of justification by grace through faith (LWI, Warsaw 2019).

Another approach is the interpretation of the social contexts of the biblical text in the epistles. The use of theological argument like the diaconal work that was mainly done by women is re-studied in a critical way. Going back to the context of the first century church's work, diaconal works plays a central importance in the church. So, the fact that it have been mostly done by women does not to devaluate women nor restricted them to any other position in the church leadership (LWI, Hanover 2019). It points out the importance of the diaconal works done by the church. The women was the first chosen by Jesus to preach his resurrection. Therefore, women's mission was not restricted to diaconal works only.

Based on these above mentioned interpretations, the LWF criticizes both the systems of power and the patriarchy that enable violence and oppression of women in the biblical texts. It claim that the church should be a safe space for everyone (LWI, Geneva November 2020). It calls its member churches to transform the patriarchal structure and model of masculinity that she inherited from the society. The policy call for works toward transformative masculinities to promote gender justice. The implementation process and initiatives engage

men and boys and produce resources that faith leaders can use in their different cultural contexts. They aim to transform stereotypes and promote positive models of masculinity (LWI, Geneva November 2020). The discussions encourages critical self-reflection and focus on masculinities in the church before starting its transformation process.

However, biblical study cannot be compared to any intellectual or scientific critical literature school works. It needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Even if an academic work should not be judged by its author's bibliography, the hermeneutical criticism of biblical texts needs strong relation of the interpreter to the inspiring Holy Spirit. The Gospel is not only a message about Christ but is above all the living Word in and through which the Lord Christ himself is still acting in the present, as he once acted in the past in the flesh (Bender, 2019, p.124). Therefore, the critical method only cannot guide to the discovery of the biblical truth.

It is also important to highlight that Lutheran theologies are not used to interpret biblical texts. Neither it is above them. They are founded in the Scriptures. And they are used as tools to support the critical hermeneutic approach, especially for more difficult biblical texts, to speak to today's context.

#### **4.3.3 Contextual hermeneutic**

As already mentioned, the first hermeneutical tool that the LWF used to discuss biblical issue related to gender justice and equality it the critical interpretation of the scriptures from scriptures. However, analyzing the churches' contexts is important to find the best way to introduce these biblically based interpretation. Different churches, as mentioned before, are facing different forms of gender injustices. Thus, the way to advocate for gender justice vary from a context to another.

The LWF GJP methodology starts from the observation of the local contexts (LWF, 2013, p.14). It is one of the most essential processes to find the right word and approach to talk about gender justice. That is why the translation of the LWF GJP in local languages is highly encouraged and supported by the LWF. It is important to speak about gender justice according to the local condition. To avoid any misunderstanding, especially from male leaders, the first approach plays a significant role in the effectiveness of the advocacy and transformative work. The strategically implementation should avoiding confrontation with local tradition and habits. The choice of appropriate words, place, time and strategic person

that bring it is crucial. Bringing change is difficult. Talking about transformation is challenging. Thus, the process of discovering the right problematic is key.

Local churches are well familiar with their local realities. Thus, they are those which should be the most involved in that process. They can then offer contextualized action to the interpretation set in the global policy. Collecting all the lists of the implementation is fundamental (LWF, 2013, p.15). God's mission through proclamation, service and advocacy for justice and peace in the world is the most popular and competent instrument to encourage gender justice. Sharing of good experiences from other churches which succeeded in their implementation of gender justice also are hopeful. They can serve as model, since some contexts are similar. However they cannot just be copied without adaptation to the existing context.

After have raised awareness and biblical teaching on gender and justice, the next process can come. The discernment and the theological reflection of the local context through dialogue with key responsible are necessary to attend the final outcome (LWF, 2013, p.15). However, analysis and discernment alone are not sufficient. As stated the policy itself, "theological reflections become relevant when associated with passionate and care for the neighbor" (LWF, 2013, p.19). Concrete actions that call the local community to judge their own system and encourage them to transform their structure founded on the care of others is relevant. It should not come from abroad. The need for change is expected to come from the local community.

That diaconal action call for the participation of all. All Christian, men and women, as priestly people should be engaged in all the processes. Both individual and group works are significant. Agreement and commitment of all the participants are crucial to attend the final goal (LWF, 2013, p.20). Each person is important. Each contribution is valuable. However, practical and financial support reinforce the local actors in their works. Therefore, the gift of the communion is at that time important from the implementation process, assessment and follow up of the local works.

Nonetheless, community which are challenging with basic need problem like poverty and war cannot look to others. Local people's daily trouble restrain them to fully involve in the program. Achieving the goal of inclusive church considering equally men and women should start from the resolution of the basic need of each LWF members. Of course, it is not necessary to wait until all these problem be solve before starting the work on gender justice.

The full participation of men and women to the church activities and life also might increase the churches' ability to solve these problems. Churches would marginalize gifts and resources God have entrusted them if they continue to marginalize women from leadership positions.

### **Summary**

We have seen from the use of the LWF GJP around the world that "we cannot eliminate injustice in the world but we are able to have such an impact on our environment that injustice and inequality can be limited" (LWI, Warsaw 2014).

In the Africa and Asia regions, the process is on the promoting of the theological foundations of the gender justice in the policy. In the other hand, in Europe and America, it is employed to increase the women's participation in the ordained ministry and high leadership position of the church. Since the biblical foundation is already included in the social system and laws of their society, its human right's side are more explored.

Nevertheless, the implementation of gender justice programs and initiatives is a long journey that call for participation of both men and women. The LWF GJP has been articulated as a clear goal at its six consecutive Assemblies (Hitchen, 2022). However, it is still part of its cross-cutting priority.

Developed by the Lutheran identity in "ongoing reformation", "sola scriptura" is the "norma normans" to critically study biblical text about gender injustice. It is the foundation of the LWF GJP ten principles. The "contextual hermeneutic", grounded in Christ's salvation works, is the "hermeneutical key" to explain according to different contexts the biblical call for justice. It is grounded in the Christ's salvation work that save the people of God to be savior of their neighbor. It guides the implementation methods.

However, it is warned not to mix these two LWF hermeneutical approaches. There is a contextual hermeneutical approach on criticizing the biblical texts too. That can be employed to interpret in the correct way the biblical text and contexts of the creation of human beings as equal. Though, that should not be mixed up with the LWF contextual approach, which study the present local context of each member churches, for an effective implementation process of the LWF GJP.

## **5 Chapter 5: FINAL REFLECTION**

### **Introduction**

The LWF GJP was introduced to all the LWF member churches. The common goal is to encourage member churches to improve the equal participation of men and women in the church and the society. The richness of the implementation tools and contextualized discussions in different member churches can improve its well-organized employment of the LWF GJP in the MLC.

Therefore, this chapter will look first on the Malagasy contexts. Accordingly, I will attempt to recommend conceivable implementation of the LWF GJP according to that situation.

The end of this chapter will summarize my opinion about the use of the LWF GJP as a tool to give change on the Lutheran teaching on women in the MLC. Afterward, I will attempt to give responses to the research questions.

### **5.1 Implementation of the LWF GJP in the MLC context**

#### **5.1.1 Need of transformative and positive masculinity for solidarity**

Like in most African and third world countries and churches, gender justice is a “very new idea” in Madagascar and the MLC (LWI, Geneva 2019). Thus, some church leaders are hesitant to publicly engage with discussion related to it. It is considered as women’s problematic. Therefore, introducing discussion about gender justice is sometimes wrongly considered by male pastors and church leaders as a call for contest against them. MLC always discuss "female ordination" and "women participation" at the same time. Therefore, both are often rejected.

Few people only, neither female theologians nor women in the leadership position or committee member and especially not a male pastor have enough motivation to discuss openly about it. That is one of the reason there is no official nor written documents that I can use as reference to discuss about it, even in this paper. I can affirm what I have experienced during the seven years, when I represented the MLC in the LWF council. During that time, I was invited to the MLC national church committee meetings and some of the regional’s and can affirm from my own observation.

Therefore, the church national committee called KMSL which gather every year seems to use the political system and the church constitution not to bring the agenda about gender justice to its highest decision-making body, called SL, which gather every four years. Thus, issues

related to women participation and ordination in the MLC are just discussed in the non-official platform of the church. However, even with these "informal discussion", men look feel angry and start to have confrontation with those who try to talk about gender justice. In 2015, the national committee decided not to take decision about it at the national level but allow each synod to have their meeting and bring their position to the next national committee meeting. Nevertheless, even the synod meetings, I attended the Boeny Mahajanga one, did not consider seriously the issue. After two formal presentation of two pastors who are for and against the women ordination, mostly without biblical foundation, the committee voted. So, four of the twenty-three MLC synods of that time only reported that they accepted the women ordination. The other was against.

I have perceived some men and women who are considered as "having the audacity" to talk about it in their "sermons" and "teachings". However, most of them are menaced by the church leadership to be excluded from the strong team of those who have the power. Thus, most of the church leaders, especially female theologians, decide to keep quiet.

In addition to that, women's voice is not considered seriously in the MLC. Thus, if the discussion is initiated by women, the whole advocacy process and arguments will be rejected. Men have strong power and influence in the MLC. People consider and obey to what they teach without questioning. That strong masculinity power can transform the church life if they engage themselves on the advocacy work in gender justice. Therefore, working in that strong masculinity power to teach about gender justice can be considered as an effective way to start the gender justice awareness raising process in the MLC.

The problem is that the theological virtue of "hope" is not encouraged at the MLC. The good point of courage is not cultivated, neither in the church nor in the Malagasy society.

The discussion about gender justice is not conducted according to the LWF guideline in the policy. It is not considered as an issue of men and women working together in a just relationships to allow both men and women flourish in their full potential and dignity that God has given them (LWI, Zimbabwe 2020). In contrary, it is seen as a conflicting discussion among men and women.

Therefore, I would suggest starting the MLC discussion from the introduction of the "positive masculinity". "Masculinity embedded in an aspirational social system with respect to gender norms and the equality of women in family, church and society" can open more men's interest to be part of the discussion (*Rimmer, 2020*). Therefore, as stated a male engaged in

*the advocacy for gender equality "the encouragement that a man receives when another man affirms our confession that the Holy Trinity is a community of love, and ours are the hands that are called to tend loving relationships"(Rimmer, 2020).*

### **5.1.2 Women empowerment**

Malagasy women are facing various challenges. Blinded by the economic problem and the poverty in the country, some the Malagasy and the MLC women might have never heard about gender equality and justice. Most of them do not even know the meaning of the celebration of the international day for women every eight of March. Uneducated women and girls are led to early pregnancy and child marriage, making them totally dependent or even rejected by their husband. Therefore, it is observed in the Malagasy society that a lot of women are left alone to care for children alone. That cause mental stress, severe psychological impact and lead to incessant suffering. The law system which does not attack these irresponsible men encourage more men to abandon pregnant young girls without any legal action. Limited access to resources exacerbates sexual exploitation and abuse in poor countries like Madagascar. That sad situation does not give choice to women and do not allow them to advocate for their right. Therefore, if there is any job opportunity, women are forced and hurried to accept them, even if they do not correspond to their qualification.

In addition to that, I can guess, from my own family life experience and my personal observation, that most of the Malagasy women are depending on their values in their relation to men in their family. Thus, all the women's pride are in their surrounding male presence, such as their father and husband. They are ashamed when they become orphan or single or divorced or widow. That is strongly related to the male powerful position granted by his gender in the society.

Thus, it is obviously effective to encourage the men leading the advocacy work on gender justice. However, the transformation of men's mindset might need a lot of patience. It is then better to start working on the women empowerment in the same time to allow both to conduct the advocacy work together.

*Living in an island, Malagasy and MLC women are often disconnected from the world and do not have enough access and information about what the other women are doing. I testimony from my own experience with the LWF that involving more women in global network like the*

LWF WICAS<sup>1</sup> and SEMA<sup>2</sup> broaden my view on women's dignity and power. Referring them to the life experiences of women and girls in different parts of the world will open their motivation to advocate for it. *Sending women to attend workshops and seminars about human dignity, equality of men and women created as image of God will allow them to learn from effective women groups. Hearing about gender justice, from its biblical and theological foundation can develop their worldviews. Provided with leadership skills will change their silence attitude and will incite them to raise their voices about abuse, discrimination and suffering from repercussions and personal accusations (LWI, Geneva 2019). It is also easier to train some women leader who can conduct local network working with the same issue and train them in their own places and languages to have the same result.*

### **5.1.3 Equipping the MLC with effective hermeneutic tools**

MLC is one of the strongest LWF member churches in Africa in term of statistic. It has six regional seminaries and one theological school of theology which trained all its male pastors and female theologians. As many of African churches, the MLC members consider the Bible as a "Sacred book" that contain the "miraculous and holy word of God". Thus, starting critical hermeneutic work in that "Holy Scriptures" is even considered as a "sin". That mentality affected even some trained pastor and theologians from the regional seminaries. Thus, questioning biblical patriarchal context is not encouraged. Reinforced by the revival movement that allow lay and non-trained people to preach in the church also promote that view. Therefore, is it observed that sometimes the exegetical method employed by trained theologians is considering the bible as the uncritical truth avoiding its biblical context.

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<sup>1</sup> WICAS : Women in Church and Society

<sup>2</sup> According to its website, SEMA is a *global network of victims and survivors working to end rape and wartime* MLC is one of the strongest LWF member churches in Africa in term of statistic. It has six regional seminaries and one theological school of theology which trained all its male pastors and female theologians. As many of African churches, the MLC members consider the Bible as a "Sacred book" that contain the "miraculous and holy word of God". Thus, starting critical hermeneutic work in the word of God is considered as a "sin". That mentality affected even some trained pastor from the regional seminaries. Thus, questioning biblical patriarchal context is not encouraged.

Starting discussion of gender justice from its biblical foundation is efficient. Only the method is considered as academic and avoiding spiritual work of the Holy Spirit to the one who is following academic method.



Otherwise, as defined earlier, any post-modern hermeneutist can claim to have reached the right interpretation. Even the original author might be in the wrong understanding of what they reported. In addition to that, it is important to remind that Bible texts are not dictated words from God or an angels, as believe the Muslim with their holy scriptures, but an inspired by His Holy Spirit words, written by human beings with feelings and human natures. Therefore, modernists, writers, interpreters and scholars are concerned by the circle of hermeneutic that finds the best interpretation by the study of the analysis. Meaning cannot be explained by any part of words of texts. The meaning of words depends on the meaning of the paragraph it belongs. That is also related to the chapter and the book it is included. Accordingly, the interpretation of one word in a specific text depends on its hermeneutical process, moving from its context's meaning to its broaden meaning. However, the best hermeneutic is the interpretation of the author related to its original contexts and author. Nevertheless, it is not the only one possible interpretation.

Challenged by these two opposite hermeneutical approaches, it is challenging to accept the hermeneutical approaches presented in the LWF GJP. Starting discussion of gender justice from its biblical foundation is efficient. Nevertheless, the foundational method, rooted in the Lutheran tradition in the document needs to be reformulated in the MLC theological teaching.

To implement Gender Justice, it is probably more possible and effective to approach the grassroots level first, rather than the leadership positions and its theological and biblical arguments (LWF, Oslo 2022).

Transforming the MLC theology and considering the gender justice as a theological, pedagogical and ethical principle need a lot of patience. Even though it is very challenging, the translation of the LWF GJP into Malagasy language is a sign of hope of change.

## **5.2 How can the LWF GJP be a resource in MLC?**

### **5.2.1 Tool for improvement in the theological education**

The LWF affirm that gender justice is an important pillar for ensuring dignity for all. Thus, advocacy work is important to transform the LWF GJP to reality (LWI, Geneva Switzerland 2020). Therefore, the LWF sees theological education as a way to promote systemic change for greater gender justice in the church and in society” (LWI, Tanzania 2021).

MLC is rooted in the traditional and cultural practices which don't recognize the value of women. These oppressive cultural practices need to be discussed from the theological seminaries in the light of biblical texts.

Luther's teaching is based on the gospel-induced Christian freedom and the equality of men and women in Christ. But his teachings, personal relation and correspondence to women and biblical hermeneutics and his follower's interpretation and sources related to his instruction on women vary and are incomplete (Alberto, 2018, p.598). That created confusions in the theological orientation and its political and social implication. Thus, deeper and broader analysis of Luther's treatment of the topic of women is still needed (Alberto, 2018, p.615).

Luther's theological anthropology on women as human being is based in his theology of creation and the fall in his lectures on the book of Genesis chapter one to three (Alberto, 2018, p.599). Luther explains the creation of women for a man's rib as indicating both equality in sharing the flesh and difference in status, not in nature, due to created second (Alberto, 2018, p.612). However, the fall changed that situation. The relationship between men and women and the sexual energy between them became a source of shame against God's design (Alberto, 2018, p.613). That was why they covered their nudity. Nonetheless, Luther's study of other women in the bible value them as example of faith and the mysterious body that can give birth to the Jesus (Alberto, 2018, p.614). However, since his theology is based on the justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers, women and men are equally call to God's mission in the church. We need reconciliation theology to help repair and bring justice to those damaged spiritually or physically as a result of either gender-based or structural violence.

### **5.2.2 Instrument of transformation in the teaching**

It is important of strengthen theological education in order to challenge patriarchal structures in both church and society. The gospel values of liberation and equal dignity for women and men are encouraged for analysis (LWI, Geneva 2019). Gender-equitable theology needs to be taught at theological institutions and preached in the congregations. Addressing matters of culture and tradition theologically should not harm or subordinate women. (LWF, 2018, p.26). All of these theological concepts are analyzed in the LWF GJP. Therefore, it is wise to follow the African approach, not bringing the document as a policy to

be adopted or be red page by page by the church. Its content can be introduced through many different and indirect ways.

Women theologians can introduce indirectly the content of the policy in their different volunteer work opportunities in the church like during sermons and teaching. However, beforehand they need to be strengthened and supported by the LWF and church partners like the NMS and the ELCA to understand the biblical foundations of the gender equality. With strong motivation and self-confidence, they can encourage the church to re-evaluate and update its hermeneutical approaches. The Scriptures that are partly selected and mostly representing bad image of women in the bible should be in the highlight of the hermeneutical model and examples as presented in the LWF GJP. The texts that the churches are preaching every Sunday can be critically improved to allow the MLC to look on other biblical texts that responds to their contexts. Introducing step by discussion about gender justice and the LWF policy from the Sunday school and all the churches' department meetings.

As recognized an African pastor in his approach to couples' counseling in his ministry, he always gave reason to men. He said, "the woman is the woman and the man is the man, and whatever the man says is what goes" (LWI, Liberia 2018). That is often used by pastor in the MLC. Therefore, change of perception by reconsidering the equality of women and men, grounded in biblical texts and Lutheran teachings are relevant.

## **Conclusion**

Gender justice does not come in the church agenda as a global issues. It was always highlighter in many biblical texts. From the creation stories, the bible talked about the equality of women and men. Men and women were created in the image of God. Therefore, the most powerful way to improve the MLC theology on women is by improving its Lutheran theology on women based on biblical texts. The interpretation key of that theology expressed clearly by Lutheran hermeneutical tools. They are the clear distinction of law and gospel by interpreting the Scriptures by the scriptures. The theology of the priesthood of all believers which is strongly related to the justification of simultaneously hundred percent guilty and hundred percent justified individuals and church make the interpretation evident. As churches in ongoing reformation, critical analysis of the text followed by contextual explanation of the dignity of all human beings is the interpretation key. Even if the MLC have difficulties to directly implement the LWF GJP principles and methodologies in its local

contexts, the document's content is powerful and can be implemented in any teaching opportunity. Supported by the LWF and the other MLC partners, male pastors and church leaders together with female theologians can bring the change to the MLC teaching on women.

Growing as young women in the LWF fashioned my life and my vocation to strengthen and courage my church to work for gender justice. With the ultimate goal of gender justice to allow both men and women be comfortable in themselves" (LWI, Geneva March 2021), it should start from each individual's transformation process to his/her family and finally to the institutional level (LWI, Nigeria 2020).

Even though the issue of gender justice is not yet fully embraced by everyone, change is a process, and it needs time because gender justice is a long journey to freedom (LWI, Zimbabwe 2020). Through its policy, the LWF is calling its member churches to continue to raise awareness, promote action and demand accountability from all their members about gender justice. It is then the role of each national church to put the policy in action according to their specific context. However, individual, as priestly blessed also can participate to that holistic mission in his and her everyday life word and action.

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