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CREATED MALE AND FEMALE, EQUAL YET DIFFERENT:

Implications for Christian Education in Muslim Countries

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INTRODUCTION

“It’s a man’s world.” This slogan, which has covered a multitude of feminine frustrations for generations, is still true today. The women’s movement cannot stand it. In Pakistan, we face this situation head on. The position of women under Islam has been the subject of repeated controversy even among Muslims. It is a live issue in Pakistan capable of generating much heat and passion. The question now is, “How should we Adventist relate to the predominance of males in our teaching profession and in our institutions.

The question of the relationship between men and women and their respective rights and duties is really a part of the larger socio-economic problem of man. Part of the solution depends on the way in which this larger problem is dealt with by a civilization. Someone has said that the conflict between both sexes cannot come to an end, as long there is too much mingling with the enemy. A love-hate relationship exists among many societies of the world today. Some people really have hard time understanding, which direction they are going and what will be the end result. Women complain male harassment, abuse, and violence where does men respond by retreating into their inner selves, the workplace, or the sports field. Thus in this essay an attempt has been made to analyze the position of women as objectively as possible taking into account what the Bible and the Quran have to say.

This study aims to bring to light a subject that is often neglected in our part of the world and when discussed it brings in disagreements and problems. I hope it would be a guide in finding ways to give recognition and equal opportunities to women. Both the Bible and the Quran teachings recognize women and give them due respect. It is my desire that the following exposition would form part of the base in which we develop our academic program and co-curricular activities in our schools. We should take the initiative of bringing awareness on the role of women in our educational setup. The end in view is for the Adventist Church in its entirety to provide opportunities for women to grow, women to excel, and women to lead.

CREATION STORY IN THE BIBLE

I. Genesis 1: Male and Female

The Bible record of creation cannot be explained by science nor it can explain the mystery of life. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Hebrews 11:3. "In the creation of the earth, God was not indebted to preexisting matter." "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Psalm 33:9. Ellen White said that all things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice and were created for His own purpose. The heavens and all the host of them, the earth and all things therein, came into existence by the breath of His mouth."¹

Genesis 1:26-31 contains three key statements: (1) God created mankind in His own image and likeness; (2) God created mankind as male and female; (3) God gave mankind dominion over all the living things with power to increase and multiple, that is, to become a race. These three statements contain two vital concepts, equality in being and differentiation in gender.

Equal Yet Different. Equality is suggested by the fact that both male and female were created in the image of God. Genesis 1:26-27 says, "Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea...' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." "Man" is mentioned twice here and refers inclusively to male and female. This is indicated by the Hebrew word for "man" (adam), which can be translated as "mankind," or "humanity:" "Let us make mankind in our own image." The second indication is the plural "them," which points to "man" as being a plurality consisting of both male and female. The fact that Genesis 1:26-27 moves back and forth three times between the singular "man" and the plural "them" clearly indicates that the term "man" is used collectively to refer to both male and female. The two sexes are part of God's original purpose for the human race and both are good. Both male and female are essential to the proper functioning of the human race.

Davidson comments on Genesis 1:27, "God equally paired male and female in parallel. There is no hint of functional superiority between male and female. Both are equally immediate to the Creator and His act." Both are given the same dominion over the earth and the other living creatures (vs 26 and 28). Both are to share alike in the blessing and responsibility of procreation (vs. 28). In short, both participate equally in the image of God. "The man and woman together make man." The holistic picture of humankind is only complete when both male and female are viewed together. Such a description points to the individuality and complementarity of the sexes."²

Genesis 1 simply affirms that male and female are equally created in the image of God but are sexually different. The implications of the gender distinctions are explained subsequently in the Bible, beginning with Genesis 2.

II. Genesis 2: Headship, Equality, and Submission

Genesis 2 expands on the creation of mankind covered in Genesis 1:26-31. While Genesis 1 affirms that God created mankind as male and female in His own image, Genesis 2 elaborates on how these two sexes were created and on the relationship between them. The Lord was pleased with this last and noblest of all His creatures, and designed that man should be the perfect inhabitant of a perfect world. Nevertheless, it was not His plan that man should live alone.

And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. God said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib, which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man." For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife both were naked and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:18-25. This was the marriage institution ordained of God, before man sinned. He celebrated the first marriage in Eden home of our first parents prepared by God Himself. He had furnished it with everything that man could desire. Marriage is honorable, and it was one of the first gifts of God to man. In Matthew 19:6, it says, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Ellen White writes as follows:

"God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided "an help meet for him"—a helper corresponding to him—one who was fitted to be his companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy, Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self; showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation. "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it." "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one." ³

In her equality with himself, Adam perceived Eve not as a threat but as a partner capable of fulfilling his inner desire: God blessed the blissful and made them one. The creation account closes with a reminder of the perfection in which Adam and Eve first came together. They felt no shame because they had nothing to hide. They lived together in perfect integrity and harmony. Although this record focuses on the similarity in nature and the partnership between man and woman, within the equality and partnership there exists clear sense of the woman's submission to man. The term "submission" is used here not with negative connotations of oppression (domination, cruelty), denigration (condemnation, belittling), or inferiority (low standard), but in the positive sense of depending upon another person for direction and protection and to ensure unity and harmony.

There are four main elements in this record that suggest a distinction between the headship role of man and the helper role of woman: (1) the priority of man's creation (Gen 2:7,22), (2) the manner of the woman's creation out of man (Gen 2:21-22), (3) the woman's having been created to be man's "helper" (Gen 2:18-20), and (4) man's naming of the woman both before and after the Fall (Gen 2:23; 3:20).

III. Genesis 3: Sin and Subordination

The first two chapters of Genesis present God's creation as He intended it to be. We have seen that God built male headship (not male domination) and female submission into the glorious pre-Fall order of creation. The third chapter of Genesis describes the disruption and distortion of creation brought about by the fall. Our purpose here is to analyze briefly how the fall affected the relationship between man and woman. The judgment pronounced upon the woman as of Genesis 3:16 attracts interest for our study.

Genesis 3:1-20 explains what went wrong with God's original perfect creation. Much of the chapter consists of what might be called a trial, in which God examines Adam and Eve, establishes their guilt, and pronounces punishment over serpent, ground, woman, and man.

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." And the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel." To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust

you shall return.” Now the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

“She was captivated by all she saw—everything around her was perfect. The nature she saw was new and refreshing. The air she breathed was pure and unspoiled. The water she drank was clear and sparkling. Every animal lived harmoniously with all others. Her marriage was perfect—her fellowship with God and her husband were a daily joy. Eve had everything anyone could desire. Then one day a voice in the garden asked her, “Did God tell you that you should not eat the fruit of any tree in the garden?” Why, she wondered, haven’t I ever noticed the special beauty of the tree, which stands in the middle of the garden? And why does my entire happiness suddenly seem to depend on eating its fruit? Eating something so desirable can only be good—Her desire was aroused. She didn’t notice that she was being deceived—that God’s Word had been twisted—that God’s love was being doubted.”⁵

God’s judgments upon the woman represent the divine remedy to maintain the intended order of the sexes as it appears in Genesis 2. Eve and Adam were not the only ones to be punished for sinning against God. Satan’s punishment was far greater. He was told of his destruction, by Someone named Immanuel, who would be born of Eve’s offspring. Was she hoping, was she expecting, that the child in her arms was the promised Messiah? Eve was a living demonstration of faith—faith that one could never sink so deeply so as not to be able to turn back to God. And hope—hope that God would give new possibilities, no matter how great the sin.

“The Creator endowed us with exciting gifts of gender meant to complement each other. We find fulfillment when we develop these gifts and explore the relationships we were made to experience. There is no limit to human potential as it develops within the divine image.”⁶

THE STATUS OF WOMAN IN ISLAM

In Muslim countries of today Islamic justice towards women is lacking. Women ask, “Where are the rights granted to me by Islam?” These have been bypassed and to some extent stifled and lost in this man’s world of oppression of the weak by the strong. For centuries the capacities of women have remained underdeveloped. Women have been denied education, training and earning opportunities. Often women have been confined within the four walls, denying them full participation and awareness of life. Physically women have been overburdened with bearing and rearing innumerable children, lacking the basic needs of life, hungry and undernourished. As a result women had succumbed to an acceptance of a submissive and subservient status of deprivation. The Prophet is reported to have said that men and women should travel as far as China, if need be, to acquire knowledge. In Islamic Republic of Pakistan, illiteracy is rampant. Illiteracy and lack of training among women is very pronounced, in rural areas the levels of literacy and education among women are pathetically low.

Islam and the Ideal of Equality

“Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the others, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because Allah has guarded them.” Sura al-Nisa 4:34.

In consonance with this spirit of equality, the Prophet of Islam constantly reminded his followers that female children should be treated exactly in the same manner as male. Prior to Islam, the daughters were looked upon with disfavor and as a kind of economic and social burden. Sura al-Nisa 2:282. The result was that male members of the family enjoyed a respect, which was denied to those of the opposite sex. There were marked differences in the treatment and upbringing of sons and daughters. All this was discouraged by the Prophet who upheld the rights of female children and insisted on their being treated on a footing of equality. The Quran has in more than one place made it plain that in regard to moral and spiritual development, men and women stand on a level of perfect equality. There are no limits to the moral progress of a woman as that of a man. For example, the Quran says:

“Men shall have the benefit of what they achieve and acquire and women shall have the benefit of that which they similarly achieve and acquire. And whosoever does good deed, whether male or female and he or she is a believer, these shall enter the garden and they shall not be dealt with a jot unjustly.” Sura al-Nisa4:24.

Despite the great stress it has laid on the essential and fundamental equality of men and women and their equal rights in all matters of vital concern, the Quran does not believe in the conception of sex equality which ignores the natural differences, special aptitudes and specific powers and faculties of men and women with the resulting fitness of men for some kinds of work and the equal fitness of women for other types of activity. On the whole, the Quran regards men and women as complementary to each other, one sex making up what the other lacks. This is evident from the following verses of the Quran, which underline the purposive nature of sex differences:

“He it is Who created you from a single being, and of the same kind did He make his mate, that he might incline to her. And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves, so that you may find quiet of mind in them and He put between you love and compassion. Men are the maintainers of women because of that excellence which Allah has given to some of them over others and because they spend out of their property. And they (women) have rights similar to those against them in a just manner and the men are a degree above them.” Sura al-Nisa 2:227-230.

The main points to be noted here are, firstly, that the female sex must be a source of comfort and peace of mind to its male counterpart; secondly, that men and women excel each other or are superior to each other in some respects and that in general statements involve certain indirect

conclusions which are of the greatest importance to social happiness. The Quran, it seems, first sets forth a general doctrine of sex equality and then qualifies and defines it with the assertion that this is not a bald and undifferentiated equality but one involving special rights and duties both for men and women, within the framework of their special responsibilities: both sexes are absolutely equal to each other.

The Quran recognizes the superiority of both sexes over each other in some respects. To the extent that men are superior to women and women to men in certain matters, the doctrine of equality must be qualified with due regard to natural facts. About the special position of men, the Quran makes two statements. Firstly, that men are the supporters or sustainers of women in an economic sense. But it must be noted that this implies no natural superiority on the part of men, nor any inherent inferiority of women, because it is purely economic arrangement dictated by natural necessities. The Quran, however, accords a slight superiority to men in general by saying that men are a degree superior to women. This superiority of men relates both to the domestic and political fields. In domestic life, final authority must rest with one sex or the other. There cannot be two co-equal authorities here as elsewhere. In the political field, decisions should rest with men in general because men are by nature gifted with a wider vision and also because their comparative freedom from certain natural limitations, which absorb a considerable amount of female time and energy, enable them to devote more attention to political affairs.

The concept of men as protectors and maintainers of women is based on the premises of the superior physical strength of the male and on the fact that the men support the women from their means. In the social and economic conditions prevalent in Arabia at the advent of Islam, physical strength was essential for protection; therefore the males protected the females. Besides it was the men who were earning and therefore it became their duty to maintain the women.

“C. R. Marsh wrote that there are three things which characterize most Muslim women: first, a background of fear—fear of being beaten, of evil spirits, of divorce, of the authority of her mother-in-law, of gossip leading to loss of honor; second, they are dominated by men or by a single man; third, “whatever the outward veneer due to western influence, there is always an underlying superstitious awe of the unseen spirit world, a respect for the religious leaders of Islam, and usually a deeply ingrained fear of God.” Ethnographic studies have proved this analysis to be close to the truth.”⁷

Family honor and solidarity are major values in most Muslim societies. All that the individual does reflects back on the way the family is regarded. The family as a whole is responsible for the actions of any individual. Members of the family are bound together by strong ties of mutual obligations and responsibilities. This interdependence represents both security and a lack of individualistic expression.

“According to the Muslim law, a child of a Muslim parent is a Muslim at birth. A parent who allows his child to be of another faith is regarded to have rejected his own religion.”⁸

The woman, particularly the wife and mother, represent the family in its aspects as a moral corporation through her reputation for modesty. The family is the focus of security, and the

woman of traditional segments of society prefers to stay within the familiar surroundings of neighborhood, friends and relations.

The Quran suggests a general doctrine of sex equality but then it also says men are a degree superior to women. Women are kept at home most of the time and are not free in their movements because their husbands, fathers, brothers, and even relatives if needed control them. It is very obvious in the Muslim world even today though some of their practices are gradually changing. There is a theory of equality but not practiced in day-to-day living. The final word in decision-making in almost everything is with the male. Therefore, their practice doesn't really meet their theory and in some areas, the Quran itself contradicts its contents. And it becomes difficult to understand. Many of such practices have a great impact on the Christian societies in the Muslim world.

Social Restrictions on Men and Women

Islam has placed certain restrictions on men as well as women in order to regulate their sex and family life, both of which it regards as the foundations of a stable and progressive civilization. The restrictions on men and women differ in accordance with their varying functions in society. To the extent that these functions differ in the case of the two sexes, their rights and responsibilities also differ and the restrictions they are required to observe also differ. Actually, these restrictions arise out of the different social responsibilities of either sex.

Now there is a periodic rise and fall in the capacity of work among women, which is an undeniable physical fact that alters their function in society and excludes them from certain kinds of work. A civilization that keeps this fact in view in the allocation of rights and duties will naturally suggest different social restrictions for women with a view to preventing them from transgressing their natural sphere of duties. A more important physical factor, which has a decisive bearing on the functions of women and marks out a different path of life for them, is the physical periodicity of women arising from menstruation. Motherhood is another important factor in the life of women, which conditions, limits and particularizes their sphere of activity. In the modern world, a large number of well-to-do women, under the influence of a wrong conception of equality, have increasingly turned away from this noble life-vocation.

Here are some of the verses taken from the Quran for us to read and analyze as to what they have to say concerning social restrictions especially on women.

1. *We read in Sura al-Baqara 2:282: "And call in to witness two witnesses, men; or if the two be not men, then one man and two women, such witnesses as you approve of, that if one of the women errs the other will remind her."*

How humiliated and cheated do women feel because of this debasing principle, which is far from being fair? How often has a virtuous woman been better than several foolish men?

2. *Sura al-Nisa 4:11: "God charges you, concerning your children: to the male the like of the portion of two females."*

Why shouldn't a man and a woman receive an equal portion of an inheritance? Don't they both have a body that needs to be covered and stomach that needs to be filled? Aren't the needs of both the same? Life is perhaps even harder for a woman if she is not yet an adult or married, or if she is a widow.

3. *Sura al-Nisa 4:3: "If you fear that you will not act justly towards the orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, four; but if you fear you will not be equitable, then only one, or what your right hands own; so it is likelier you will not be partial."*

Isn't the family a picture of society in miniature? If one man marries four women and has a large number of concubines, he will inevitably do them injustice, which will breed rancor and hatred, and will often result in divorce. And what about the innocent children of divorced parents; won't they be torn between mother and father or, even worse, wander about homeless? Furthermore, if a man can marry four or more women at once, why isn't the woman allowed to marry four men simultaneously as well? Isn't it best to regard the original divine institution, which God established when He created one Adam and one Eve?

4. *Sura al-Nisa 4:34: "And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them; God is All-high, All-great."*

The Quran asserts that if a woman fears her husband will reject her or desert her, she should have recourse to a "court of arbitration" consisting of her people and his, so as to reconcile them: "If a woman fear rebelliousness or aversion in her husband, there is no fault in them if the couple set things right between them; right settlement is better" (Sura al-Nisa 4"128), Yet in the same breath the Quran says that if a man fears his wife will rebel against him, he should beat her by slapping her with his hand, punching her with his fist, kicking her with his fee, lashing her with a whip or thrashing her with a stick. What a world of difference there is between this teaching of the Quran and that of the New Testament: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it...So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his won flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, His flesh, and His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave hiss father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (Ephesians 5:25-33). Sometime an influential man divorces his wife in a fit of anger. Later, as is often the case, he regrets what he has done and desires to .have his wife back. But Islamic law compels this woman to have intercourse with another man before she can return to her husband. How inhuman and degrading this is!`

5. *Sura al-Baqara 2:230: "If he divorces her finally, she shall not be lawful to him after that, until she marries another husband. If he divorces her, then it is no fault in them to return to each other, if they suppose that they will maintain God's bounds. These are God's bounds; He makes them unto a people that have knowledge."*

Don't reasonable people repudiate this odd system? Why would the Quran allow a woman to be reconciled to her husband and return to him after she had married another man, whom Arabs call a muhallil? Why did Muhammad curse both the muhallil and the original husband?

6. *Sura al-Nur 24:31: "And let them cast their veils over their bosoms."*

Why should a woman be put in a prison like the veil? The veil kills the spirit of work and personal freedom in the woman, and brings humanity back to the age of slavery.

7. *Sura al-Nur 24:33: "And constrain not your slaves girls to prostitution, if they desire to live in chastity, that you seek the chance goods of this life. Whosoever constrains them, surely God, after their being constrained, is All-forgiving, All-compassionate."*

Isn't it a commendable thing to command the girls to declare their obedience to God and to prohibit the practice of prostitution? Instead of saying "God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate," he should have said, "Surely God is severe in visiting His punishment, except toward those who repent!"

8. *Sura al-Nisa 4:15: "Such of your women as commit indecency, call four of you to witness against them; and if they witness, then detain them or God appoints for them a way."*

Does life imprisonment correct the guilty in such a case? How could a sixteen-year girl be detained if she were to live to the age of eighty? It is more suitable to give the sinner a chance to repent and live a new and holy life.

9. *We read in Sura al-Ahzab 33:53-55: "And if you ask his wives for any object, ask them from behind a curtain; that is cleaner for your hearts and theirs... There is no fault in the Prophet's wives touching their fathers, their sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women and what their right hands own. And fear you God; surely God is witness of everything."*

Does the veil keep the eyes of an immoral man from lusting? The immoral man sees with the eye of imagination! The Bible speaks of a new birth and transformation of heart by the Holy Spirit. A man with such a transformed heart is to "put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

10. *Sura al-Maida 5:5: "Today the good things are permitted you, and the food of those who were given the Book is permitted to you, and permitted to them is your food. Likewise believing women in wedlock, and in wedlock women of them who were given the Book before you if you give them their wages, in wedlock and not in license, or as taking lovers."*

The Quran permits Muslims to have Christian wives, while the New Testament forbids explicitly the marriage of Christian women to non-Christians. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:39, "She is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." The verse in Sura al-

Maida is ultimately a declaration of respect for the Christians faith, since the Christian mother, in that case, will be rearing the children of the Muslim husband.

Islam has laid down certain social restriction both on men and women. Some of them are common to either sex, while some are different and arise from a particular conception of womanly duties. On the whole, the Islamic pattern of life is one of which women has her main functions confined to home life. This does not mean that she is completely debarred from going out or taking part in wider activities, as the old-fashioned Muslim maintain. But there is no doubt that Islam disapproves of a social pattern in which women neglect their primary and essential functions or plunge into wider spheres of activity at the cost of their primary duties. Women who have the time and ability to do useful service in the social or political field are not prevented by Islam to enter these fields, provided it does not prejudice or impede their function at home.

Woman in the Days of Jesus

Perhaps one area where Jesus concept of God showed itself as completely different from that of the religious leaders of His day was His attitude and action towards women. To understand this better, we need to know the social status of women in the time of Jesus and His attitude and action towards it.

During the days of Jesus, women and children had a low and insignificant social status. The women's value and worth was only seen in terms of sex and bearing children. Young girl was owned by their father and had no rights of her own. After marriage, her husband owned her with a few rights, and the right of divorce was only with the husband if he found "some indecency in her" (Deuteronomy 24:1). In the days of Jesus, the expression "some indecency" was interpreted as not being pretty, not knowing how to cook well, not bearing children, etc. In case of divorce, the father, who had a greater social worth than the mother, who was kept in low esteem, kept children by law.

Women nor children were to be heard nor seen in public. Infact, women and especially single girls in general were not to go out at all. It is still general practice in Middle Eastern society that women cover their faces in the public. Failing to do so was considered a big offence and her husband had the right to divorce her. He would be under no obligations to pay her the sum of money to which she was entitled under the marriage contract.

Men were not allowed to be alone nor speak to a woman, even his wife, in public. Love affairs were not to be practiced in the public place. And of course, travel with a woman was out of the question. If a woman talked with people on the road, she could be divorced without any payment. Schools were only for boys and not for girls. Her value as a woman was in having children and learning to care for domestic responsibilities. It was considered a great misfortune if a woman couldn't bear children especially male who were to pass husbands name to future generations. In all aspects of life, women socially were regarded as inferior to men.

In religious life, women were also considered inferior to men. It was believed that God had made them that way. Women slaves and children were forbidden to teach or even to give thanks after a meal. In Synagogues, men and women would not come into physical contact during

worship. Synagogues were made only if there were ten men and certainly were not made for women. When Paul came to Philippi, there was no Synagogue, because there were all women believers. He met with them by the river (Acts 16:13).⁹

“Reading the Torah in the synagogue by a woman was strictly forbidden. And it was declared, “May the words of the Torah be burned, they should not be handed over to a woman.” But perhaps the saying, which most strikingly epitomizes the rabbinic depreciation of women as that of Rabbi Juda ben Elai (c. AD 150):

One must utter three doxologies every day:
Praise God that he did not create me a heathen!
Praise God that he did not create me a woman!
Praise God that he did not create me an illiterate person!

Jewish authorities looked upon this prayer as a normative statement. And it was faithfully offered for centuries in the synagogues, in the hearing of women, who were taught simply to pray: “Praise God that he created me.” Thus in everything that touched all aspects of a woman’s life in Israel, she was considered a second-class citizen, and inferior to men, and from the day she was born. Widows and single women were just plain outcasts, at the mercy of others. What chance did these women have of improving their lot in life? None in that society. That is, until Jesus came.”¹⁰

How Did Jesus Treat Women?

We find here some similarities in the status of women in Islam and during the time of the New Testament. Whatever the value of women considered accepted is even true today in the Middle Eastern society. In Islam Muslim people continued keeping women a degree lower than men as advised in the Quran, when it also mentions about equality between the both sexes.

Coming of Jesus brought change in the value and worth of a woman. In our study and research of the New Testament, we find it very satisfactory and comforting prospect nature of how Jesus Christ dealt with women of His day. The ancient oriental culture had many issues in the social life of the people in Palestine that were very strange and difficult to comprehend. One of those issues was how these people reacted to some of the moral problems in their religious life. During Jesus’ ministry on this earth, He always promoted God’s original plan for male and female. Jesus ignored all of these existing rules, regulations, social mores, and class or gender divisions.

It is interesting how Joseph who was engaged to be married to Mary and learned that she was with a child he decided, “to put her away privily” Matthew 1:19. Yet Matthew calls him ‘just man’ and by ‘just man,’ it was a righteous man, who did not do wrong things. “To put her away privily,” suggest that he considered Mary an adulteress; therefore being morally right he, and Joseph’s decision to refrain from the ceremony of marriage with Mary was in accordance with laws of Moses. Jesus came at such a time of moral crisis when the law of adultery was applied to

women only. Unfortunately, the male partner involved in the act of adultery with another woman was free from the guilt of immoral conduct.

Let us consider the woman who was brought before Jesus for the act of adultery. Did she commit adultery? Yes, but what happened to the man who had an affair with her. Why wasn't he brought? If the person involved in adultery had to be stoned according to the Law of Moses, then why not the man who was a sexual partner with her. It was then obvious that standard of judgment was partial to the man, but not to the woman. This story is found in John 8:1-8. When Jesus started writing on the ground, these men vanished after He had asked them a few questions. They themselves were involved in adultery and could not cast a stone on the woman. He asked her, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?" She said, "no man Lord." And said unto her, neither do I thee: Go, and sin no more."

Did Jesus change the law of adultery? Not at all. In fact, he magnified the very thought of lust in his heart for a woman equal to adultery Matt 5:27,28. At the same time Jesus' example teaching was that only an Jesus' example taught them that only absolutely sinless person could take part in matters of punishment of any guilt. In other words sinners cannot punish another sinner. On the other hand, Jesus who himself was absolutely sinless did not punish that woman. So this was the kind of tender care he had for sinners, and women who were being dominated by their male in the society.

Notice the incident the Samaritan woman in John 4:7-30. Since she was a Samaritan, she was an outcast in the eyes of Israelites---ethnically inferior; she was woman---socially inferior; and, she was "living in sin," as she already had five husbands, and the man she was now living with was not her husband---morally inferior. In those days also men would divorce woman easily. Jesus deliberately chose to talk with her and asked for water. Then the woman said, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, asks drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said, had you asked me, I would have given you the living water. Very clearly Jesus declared Himself and His mission. She learnt that He was the only man Who understood how she felt. Her testimony to the people was: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ (Messiah)?" These are the words of a lady who is forgiven and loved.

"Jesus was very angered with the marriage and divorce practices of His day and spoke vehemently against them in Matthew 19:3-12. "He said to them 'for your hardness of hearty Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery'" (vss. 8, 9). Here Jesus provided women a sense of security and importance in an age when they did not count and had few rights. He decried the ease with which men could divorce their wives. The effect of this teaching was to protect and improve the right of women." ¹¹

"Jesus was comfortable in the presence of women. In the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, He could speak with perfect freedom, relax and fell at home. He went out of His way to heal the Syro-Phenician woman's daughter (Mark 7). The

widow of Nain was restored to dignity with the resurrection of her son (Luke 7). Two different occasions---with the woman who touched His garment (Luke 8) and the woman in the synagogue with an infirmity (Luke 13)---Jesus stopped the proceedings and ministered to women in need, in spite of male opposition, thereby restoring their self-worth and value as human beings”¹²

This woman is also known in the gospel of Luke 7:36-50 for immoral conduct. Simon, a Pharisee, who had leprosy and was healed by Jesus, invited Him as a special guest for a feast in his house. Mary learnt that Jesus was invited to Simon’s house. She showed her gratitude to Jesus and brought in ointment. She started washing Jesus feet with her tears. Simon did not remember Jesus’ kindness to him, but began to show disrespect to his guest. Jesus compared the debtors; one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty, and asked that the creditor forgave the two. Jesus asked him, “Who will love the creditor the most.” Simon said, “I suppose that he to whom he forgave the most.” Similarly Jesus compared the act of Mary to that of Simon that this woman has done what you should have done. You gave no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with tears. The comparison was clear that the greater sinner as the woman was she showed greater love for Jesus than did Simon. Jesus showed love and compassion and said, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza points out:

“Sinners, prostitutes, beggars, tax collectors, the ritually polluted, the crippled, and the impoverished---in short, the scum of Palestinian society---constituted the majority of Jesus’ followers. These are the last that have become the first, the starving who have been satisfied, and the uninvited that have been invited. And many of these were women.”¹³

CONCLUSION

Many Christians of the past has regarded Christianity superior over Islam especially obvious in the realm of morals and ethics. The exploitation of the Muslim woman was contrasted with the superior status of the woman in Christian society. The logical outcome of such an attitude was to establish schools and educating men and women according to the norms of western society. Today, while most of the world continues to acknowledge the technological superiority of western civilization, on the moral plane their superiority is highly questionable. In light of the disintegration of the family in western society, the high rate of crime and divorce, the increasing frequency of wife and child-beatings, and the increasing acceptability of sexual perversion, they have little of which to boast. We must reevaluate our own attitudes toward Muslim society and the relationship of the gospel to the Muslim woman and family.

It is true that Islam’s concept about the emancipation of women in some areas is vague. They claim that Islam was the first religion to confer specific rights on women, provided equality between the sexes, and recognized the right of women to inheritance. It did not enjoin seclusion, but it insisted on moral decency. Women were free to attend mosques. In order to ensure the sanctity of home life, Islam prohibited the free mingling of sexes. Islam provided for a division of functions between the sexes and set different spheres of activity for them. Women were

required to attend to household duties, and men were required to attend to their jobs outside homes. Women can freely move about and go out, but they are to go out dressed simply and adequately covered. Men are enjoined to keep down their eyes, and not to look at women. A woman is not allowed to strike acquaintance or establish contacts with strangers. It is the duty of both men and women to safeguard their morals. That is the only way of building a sound and happy family life.

Some Muslim traditions do make sense. In certain other areas, we find much contradiction within the Quran's pages and it becomes difficult to understand. For example, a woman's testimony and inheritance worth half a man's and both sexes are equal but it also says that men are a degree above the women. The majority of works written about Muslim women deal with what men think of women and how men regulate women's lives; but the worldview of the Muslim woman has remained largely a puzzle to Westerners and, not likely, to Muslim men.

Christianity has more to offer. Jesus brought in the difference that needs to be preached to the world. Vast segments of Middle Eastern society have been influenced by centuries of tradition that remain relatively untouched by modernization and they are far from the path of reason and moderation. Yet to the Muslim woman Jesus Christ offers dignity and wholeness, complete cleaning by his blood, and full membership in the priesthood of believers. How can we convey this to her? Continually we hear in Pakistan expressions like, 'the man is the king of the house,' 'the husband is the second God,' or 'a husband is the crown on a woman's head.' And it illustrates to a certain degree the relationship between husband and wife. Humility and obedience are indeed the external characteristics of the social intercourse between husband and wife.

Our religion is a religion of love. "All I learn here, said a Mohammedan woman in a missionary hospital, is of love. We hear no mention of love in our religion." It is the love of Christ that will speak most urgently to the Muslim woman. Yet Muslim women also see that respect comes before love. Surely our highest respect to the Muslim woman can be seen in acknowledging the goodness of her values, and accommodating ourselves to her ways.

In the present day economic conditions existing in Pakistan women have to play a fuller and more definite role as producers. With the low per capita income and constant high rate of population growth, and consistent inflation there is an urgent need to draw increasing numbers of women towards gainful employment in the economic and social sectors. For better living conditions for themselves and their families, women need to work outside the home. For proper utilization of their skills, education and training are necessary for women to work to earn money. For the acceptance of women as equals, women must share in the processes of economic growth and realizations.

Unfortunately young women on the threshold of life, with few exceptions, have not been brought up with any intention or training to work outside the home and earn their own living. Young girls are brought up to cater to the male needs for a wife. Marriage is their primary goal, leading to life-long economic dependence and often poverty. The labors of women in the home are taken for granted and rarely considered an economic contribution. Lacking confidence in them, and without the training and capacity for gainful employment and earning outside the home,

women, in the present day economic conditions of over-population and paucity of the basic needs of life, especially in developing countries, will remain downtrodden.

To rise to a status of independence from male domination, women must assert themselves in the economic world as workers outside the home. Economic sufficiency is difficult to visualize without the toil of women. There must be a change in attitudes, not only of men but also of women. For too long women have been sheltered to submission. Mass communication media, which has seeped to practically every village of Pakistan, must be employed to create an image of woman as a working person, employed in economic work within and outside the home, worthy of respect and recognition.

In rural areas women are found working on agricultural lands along with men, as also caring for domestic animals. Here too she works as a subservient helper on family lands. In rural economy quite often it is the family that is the production unit. Women, who work in several ways, in addition to the housework and caring for children, do not receive wages in cash or in kind. Her work is taken for granted and not recognized in economic terms. It is only the number of sons that she produces to work on the land that is recognized. In the rural structure that has evolved few women work as wage earners, mostly during peak periods of sowing or harvesting. Rural women also undertake activities such as sewing, embroidery, and cottage industries, which require little movement beyond their immediate communities.

In urban areas women are coming forward to work in substantially larger numbers everyday, mostly in sex segregated jobs, as there is a tendency of seclusion of women in urban areas. Though due to socio-economic factors many women work in factories and industries, quite often going to and from work in their burqas (veils). A number of women work in small industrial homes, fulfilling orders for sewing and embroidery. Often agents take the work to the homes of women who remaining in the home sew and embroider for monetary remuneration.¹⁴

We have seen what the Bible and the Quran say about the status of women. These teachings have always been there, but obviously not been followed as the culture dictated differently. Even in the days of Jesus, women were not treated equally. In fact, they were low and insignificant in their social status in the community. Women did not enjoy their full rights as man did. Pakistan lacks education and its economic conditions are not any better. Majority of the people live in the villages, where education and health facilities are limited. Christians are well influenced by the Muslim culture and beliefs. They also believe in not sending girls to school and marrying them off soon. Thus, girls do not get education that makes them better mothers and wives or engage in various other endeavors of life, which would give a value and a worth in the society.

There is a great challenge before Christians and especially Adventists to uphold the banner with the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Adventist church has not done much in promoting education among Muslims. We do not mingle with Muslims nor in general accept them in our schools. The Roman Catholic and a few Protestant schools do admit Muslim students, and they are successful and popular. They are required to have separate school buildings for boys and girls. Schools with co-education are also being introduced. Many of these Christian institutions have produced leaders of the country and offer good education; and therefore, have become so popular

that it is difficult to get admission. Muslim graduates of mission schools have a different view on Christians.

Adventists have a great responsibility on their shoulders to form some workable strategy to bring awareness in this male dominant society. There have been some steps taken but our progress has been slow because we did not focus on Muslim societies. Education needs to be promoted which will help improve economic conditions of a family and ultimately the country. Young people will learn about family planning that will help reduce population growth, and they will also learn the real values of life that helps shape up their future life. Similarly, health education also needs to be promoted because these areas of education help us to get into Muslim societies burden upon. Ellen White agrees that girls should be educated that they could be of some value in the society.

“A woman who has been taught to take care of herself is also fitted to take care of others. She will never be a drug in the family or in society. When fortune frowns, there will be a place for her somewhere, a place where she can earn an honest living and assist those who are dependent upon her. Woman should be trained to some business whereby she can gain a livelihood if necessary. Passing over other honorable employments, every girl should learn to take charge of the domestic affairs of home, should be a cook, a housekeeper, a seamstress. She should understand all those things, which it is necessary that the mistress of a house should know, whether her family is rich or poor. Then, if reverses come, she is prepared for any emergency; she is, in a manner, independent of circumstances. A knowledge of domestic duties is beyond price to every woman. There are families without number whose happiness is wrecked by the inefficiency of the wife and mother.”⁴

Our schools offer education to boys and girls on the same campus. Here they study, worship, and play together; and also learn to respect and appreciate each other. To avoid some future problems, we have not been admitting Muslim students in our schools. Just recently we have started accepting a few in lower classes, but far from our main school campus.

In the church, women work as teachers, office workers, nurse, and in some areas as leader. Some suggestions and recommendations to improve and build women for better worth in the society and to show Muslims by example.

1. Build more co-education schools especially in the rural areas. Every church should have a church school for boys and girls in the community. Education should be made necessary and compulsory for the Adventist children.
2. Hire female teachers preferably local pastor's wife. Hiring of female staff in the church work should be fair.
3. Admission should be made available to limited Muslim students. Proper legal agreements should be made with parents to maintain church's standard and principles. Bible teaching has to be promoted.
4. Courses on Islam should be offered in the college level that our young people might learn how to approach Muslims in sharing Christ's love. We should not keep distance from reaching Muslims.

5. Print more books on health and religion that our Literature Evangelists could sell among Muslims. Free literature should also be printed, which could be distributed among people who are interested.
6. Have more hospitals, clinics, and health education centers. Various health programs need to be presented especially on hygiene, cleanliness, and temperance in the rural areas.
7. Encouraging academic excellence by providing merit scholarship.
 - a. Up-grading –sponsorship for further studies
 - b. Promoting sports for women
8. Build vocational schools

Through education and health, we should try to reach to Muslims. Offer fair and equal opportunities for boys and girls to excel educationally. Only when female students excel academically as well as in extra curricular activities will they be perceived as individuals capable of handling responsibilities other than child-bearing and housekeeping which also are essential. Parents should also be a part of the re-education on the value of women by keeping them informed and as much as possible involved in the programs being carried out by the school in the recognition of women.

The study of this important principle should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as an exploration of a divine plan designed to ensure unity in diversity. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The reason why God gave different gifts and functions to men and women is not that we may argue about who is the greatest in the kingdom, but that men and women as joint heirs of the gift of eternal life, may use their different gifts to build up the body of Christ and bring human beings with their many differences into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In willingly following the divine plan, we will find our greatest strength and harmony both in our homes and in the church.

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