

CREATION OF A JUST AND COMPASSIONATE SOCIETY: A Feminine Project

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Abstract: God desires that human beings live in peace and harmony with one another and nature. This harmony was lost when sin entered the world and patriarchy emerged as a consequence (Genesis 3: 16). Women lost their God given identity and were given an identity constructed by the patriarchal society. In the process, certain human qualities like compassion, nurturance, and cooperation, which were termed as feminine were also suppressed. This resulted in injustice and oppression, taking humanity farther away from its task of creating a just society. Jesus' experience of God as *Abba*, his proclamation of the Reign of God and his integrated personality wherein he combines both the feminine and masculine dimensions of the human psyche paves a new way. The creation of a just and compassionate society is possible only when the feminine qualities of the human psyche are recognized as equally valuable and allowed to blossom both in men and women.

Keywords: *Abba*, Community, Compassion, Feminine, Inclusive Discipleship, Masculine, Patriarchy, Reign of God.

1. Introduction

The present postmodern world we live in is characterized by great scientific and technological progress. We are overwhelmed by the speed with which communication and information

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technology is progressing. Human life has become more and more comfortable for those who have wealth and money. The world has shrunk considerably and instant communication is possible to any part of the world. Knowledge is made easily available and accessible to anyone at the tip of their fingers. However, an ordinary person may find it very difficult to keep abreast with the knowledge created in every field.

It will be worth reflecting on the quality of human life amidst the apparent progress we are making. Have we become better human beings with the advance in science, technology, communication, information, etc. or have we become less and less human? If one has to go by what the news papers report these days, then there is no doubt that we are not becoming better but worse. Not a single day passes without hearing of rape of women and even little girls. Acid attacks, murders, dowry deaths, molestation, kidnappings, terrorist attacks, communal riots, persecution and killing of religious minorities, etc. have become everyday news.

Indeed we live in a world torn by war and violence, bloodshed and hate. The blood that is shed by ISIS in the Middle East, the terror attacks by militant groups in different parts of the world, over militarization and competition in accumulating nuclear weapons by different countries, all these make human life unsafe and precarious besides putting the planet earth itself in peril.

The inherent role of any religion is to provide moral guidance to human society and lead humanity towards its ultimate destiny. But today most religions too have become irrelevant. They seem to have lost their credibility. Religious leadership with few exceptions seems to be unaffected by what is happening in today's world. They are shying away from giving adequate responses to the burning problems of our times. As a result religions have lost their prophetic edge and have become mediocre in their performance and functioning. Hypocrisy and corruption seem to be the hallmark of many religious leaders. Consequently more and more people are either walking away

from religion and its rituals or use religion for their vested interests.

It is in this context that the present paper explores the seemingly utopian theme "Creation of a Just and Compassionate Society: A Feminine Project." In order to unravel this theme, the paper will first of all try to understand the concept *feminine*. The second part of the paper will argue that this project is truly the project of God from the beginning of creation. This is clear from the Christian understanding of revelation culminating in the person of Jesus and his proclamation of the Reign of God. The paper further expounds how Jesus lived his femininity and inaugurated the Reign of God vision on this earth. Finally the paper argues that this project of God cannot be brought into completion without liberating the feminine in our world.

2. Describing the Feminine

The word or the concept *feminine* is used and understood differently by different people. Some feminists avoid using this term since it can be easily misunderstood. For instance, the terms *femininity* and *masculinity* are sometimes used to attribute different qualities exclusively to men or women. Accordingly gentleness, caring, honesty, vulnerability, emotionality, etc., are seen as belonging exclusively to women while rationality, being assertive, self confident, strong, intelligent, etc., belonging exclusively to men. But woman's experience tells her that she does not have the monopoly of these qualities attributed to her nor are all men by nature aggressive, cunning, strong and intelligent. It means that a mother aggressively attacking a baby-snatcher is not behaving like a man but like a woman protecting her child. Similarly a man gently nursing a sick parent is not behaving like a woman but like a caring and concerned son.

Moreover, feminine or femininity has been exclusively used to describe what pertains to women or to give an identity to the female. According to Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, "To define femininity is like walking through a room lined with distorting mirrors. It tells us more about male projections of femininity

than it is able to tell us about femininity itself."¹ In most feminist discourses therefore femininity is seen as something negative because it is a constructed identity of the female in a given society. Most feminists hold the view that human beings are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, "a mode of enacting and re-enacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh."²

Michael Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* describes how various disciplinary practices undertaken in schools, in the army, in hospitals and prisons produce "subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies."³ Under the influence of internalized patriarchal values, women too, undertake disciplinary practices that produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine. Bartky talks about three categories of such practices: first those practices that aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration; second, those that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements; and third, those that are directed toward the display of this body as an ornamental surface. Bartky argues that these disciplinary practices must be understood in the light of the modernization of patriarchal domination, a modernization

¹Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, "Woman's Nature and Feminine Identity. Theological Legitimations and Feminist Questions," *Concilium*, No. 194, (1987), 93- 101, 94.

²Judith Butler, "Embodied Identity in de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*"(unpublished manuscript presented to American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, March 22, 1985), 11. As cited by Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, eds., Carole R. McCann and Seung-kyung Kim, New York and London: Routledge, 2010, 404-418, 405.

³Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan, trans., New York: Vintage Books, 1979, 138.

that unfolds historically according to the general pattern described by Foucault.⁴

Women experience a dilemma when it comes to their identity. The Italian feminist Rosalie Rosanda describes this dilemma as a chronic vacillation between two temptations:

... on the one hand we have the search for an identity in the special and separate sphere into which women have been forced, and which has for thousands of years been the everyday life they live: the realm of emotion, the physical, feeling, non-violence, gentleness, beauty, the daily reaffirmation of life, down to the glorification of feminine sexuality as oh-so-tender, do diffuse, so melting, so receptive; and to the point when the maternal role is rediscovered as destiny. On the other hand we are faced with the violent rejection of this identification, because – whether it is imposed or demanded – it grows up as a projection of 'the other person's' identity – as a complementary fantasy or hallucination of male sexuality.⁵

I agree with these authors about the notion of femininity that is constructed and imposed on women. Such constructions need to be resisted so that women can find their true identity as human persons. However, my concern here is about the suppression of certain human values which are necessary for building a just and compassionate society. These values are usually termed as feminine values especially in psychological theories.

According to Jungian psychological theory, the psyche of every human being comprises of both the *anima* and the *animus* i.e., the feminine and the masculine. However the feminine had been suppressed and devalued for many centuries or even millennia. Since women were considered to embody the feminine in a unique way, they too were suppressed. As a result women, men and even nature are suffering in different ways. They are longing for integration and birthing of a new social and

⁴Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 406.

⁵Rosalie Rosanda, *Le Altre*, Milano: 1980, cited in Meyer-Wilmes, "Woman's Nature and Feminine Identity," 93-4.

spiritual order. This will entail the liberation of the feminine as well as the liberation of women from all oppression. However, the liberation of women and the liberation of the feminine are not exactly the same. Yet one cannot speak of liberation of the feminine in a society where women are considered unequal and inferior to men.

How do we understand what is feminine? According to some scholars, when we talk about the feminine, we talk about our concept of the human person and of relationships between persons.⁶ Ulanov describes three dominant approaches to the feminine aspect that have emerged. These are the biological, the cultural, and the symbolic. The biological approach is mainly found in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in the thinking of Freud and his followers. According to this approach the anatomy is destiny. Freud derived the psychology of the feminine as a wounded psyche since the female body lacks the phallus.

The cultural approach is represented by Karen Horney and Margaret Mead. Their psychology of the feminine derives from the influences of cultural tradition, from the customs and habits that have moulded if not recreated society's definition of femininity.⁷

The symbolic approach to the feminine is represented by C.G. Jung and the Jungians. According to this school of thought, there are three striking differences between the first two approaches and the symbolic approach. First, the feminine is not confined only to female. Second, the nature of the feminine can be expressed in the language of symbols and myths and third, personal wholeness can only be achieved by a full awareness of

⁶Ann B. Ulanov, *The Wisdom of the Psyche: The Feminine in Jungian Psychology and in Christian Theology*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971.

⁷Karen Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, New York: W. W. Norton and Co, 1967.

contra sexuality, that is, the presence of the opposite polarities of feminine and masculine in each person.⁸

In recent years Jean Baker Miller described the psychology of the feminine in terms of being-in-relationship.⁹ She reconstructed the theoretical concept that women's sense of self is different from that of men. Connection or relationship with the other is important for all human beings but it has different meanings for men and women. As a result, studies show that given a choice, girls prefer cooperation to competition. They are concerned with developing shared norms and cohesion within the group. They use speech to create and maintain relationships of intimacy and equality, to criticize others in acceptable ways and to interpret accurately the speech of others.¹⁰ This way of being-in-relationship is in contrast to Modern world's overemphasis on being one's own independent self at the expense of inter-dependent communal style of functioning.

Femininity was previously described as the ideal of womanhood, of being female, whereby women are defined as different and inferior to men. This view conforms to men's image of what women should be and how they should behave. This is found to be a skewed definition of what feminine is. Feminine psychology is not simply women's psychology. Even though women have the clear predisposition to manifest much of what is called feminine, these are not the qualities of women alone. Feminine qualities are found in men, women as well as in nature.¹¹

For Carl Jung, the feminine and its psychology describe certain modalities of being which belong to all human beings

⁸Ulanov, *The Wisdom of the Psyche*, as referred by Rosamma John Pandanam, ICM, *Liberating the Feminine: An Overview of Psychology of the Feminine in Women, Men and Nature*, Delhi: Media House, 2007, 16.

⁹Jean Baker Miller, "Women and Power," in *Women's Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center*, Judith V. Jordan, Alexandra G. Kaplan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene P. Stiver, and Janet L. Surrey, eds., New York: The Guilford Press, 1991.

¹⁰Pandanam, *Liberating the Feminine*, 51.

¹¹Pandanam, *Liberating the Feminine*, 28.

besides factors which form a specific female sexual identity. These modalities are styles of being and of awareness, ways of relating to reality, digesting reality, and making judgments about it. Jung describes the feminine symbolically as a principle of being. It is an inner law or essence. He further describes the feminine principle as *eros*, whose nature is in contrast to the *logos*, the symbolic concept representing the masculine principle. The concept of *eros* describes symbolically the psychic urge to relate, to join, to be in-the-midst-of, to reach out to, to value, to get in touch with, to get involved with concrete feelings, things, and people, rather than to abstract or theorize. On the other hand the *logos* is associated with discrimination, judgment, insight, and relation to non-personal truths.¹²

Bakan has offered one distinction between masculine and feminine traits. Accordingly, masculinity is described with a sense of 'agency,' and femininity with a sense of 'communion.' He described agency as goal-directed sense of self, manifested in such characteristics as sense of self assertion, self expansion, and self protection in contrast to communion, which reflects selflessness, and the need to be one with others. A high degree of agency or communion unchecked by the other is destructive of the individual and society.¹³ Most desirable is the abundance of both according to each one's capacity, namely androgyny.¹⁴

French describes two basic principles that motivate masculine and feminine traits.¹⁵ First, masculine principle is rooted in power-in-the-world with its act to kill, whereas the feminine principle is rooted in nature, with its act to give birth. Accordingly masculine qualities are those that demonstrate

¹²Pendanam, *Liberating the Feminine*, 30.

¹³D. Bakan, *The Duality of Human Existence*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1996, cited in Pendanam, *Liberating the Feminine*, 54,

¹⁴When a person possesses a high degree of both masculine and feminine traits, it is described as *androgyny*. Studies have indicated that androgynous women and men generally exhibit higher levels of personal adjustment, self-esteem, maturity, and role flexibility than do more sex-typed individuals. See Pendanam, *Liberating the Feminine*, 29.

¹⁵Pendanam, *Liberating the Feminine*, 54.

control and transcendence. Permanence and structure are masculine ideals because they seem to control fluid experience. The feminine principle on the other hand, is rooted in nature, with its act to give birth. It is associated with nature, and is not considered a fully human principle. It is associated with everything fluid, transient, and flexible, qualities that sometimes denoted weak. It is thus the pole of sexuality and bodily pleasure, of nutritive-ness, compassion, sensitivity to others, mercy, supportiveness and all giving qualities. It is also the pole of emotion. Love is 'feminine' especially the non-egoistic love associated with mothering.

Although women have more of inborn feminine principles that motivate them, French opines that they are easily absorbed into 'masculine' structures and thinking because of their fuller integrity and adaptability. The assimilation of women into a world dominated by masculine values leads to a weakening of feminine values, a loss of ability to act on those values, and amounts to a use of those values in support of destructive and ugly societies pervaded by racism, sexism, exploitation, war, and competition that destroy the community.¹⁶

Caprio derived the following feminine and masculine characteristics from Jung and Jungian followers. Feminine thinking is reflective, associative, circular and receptive. Therefore, those with feminine thinking are constantly in relationship to – themselves, others, and the environment. Other words that describe feminine qualities are:

- Non-active, incoming, static, resting, stillness, waiting, contemplative
- Indirectness, diffuseness, winding, surrendering, letting go
- Practicality, grounding, connectedness, relationship, receptivity, containing, embracing, nurturing, loving,

¹⁶M. French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1985, cited in Pendanam, *Liberating the Feminine*, 54-55.

subjectivity, accepting ambiguity, going beyond/around, welcoming

- Mixing, merging, unifying, synthesizing, community, family
- Listening, absorbing, non-linear, simultaneous, essence oriented, caring for what is already present.¹⁷

3. Creation of Just and Compassionate Society

From the beginning of creation, God desired to create a loving community. Human beings were entrusted with the responsibility of forming one community by loving one another. They were also expected to take care of the entire creation. God endowed the human beings with many gifts of mind, body and spirit, the greatest being the gift of freedom. With the abuse of freedom, sin and evil entered the world. The consequence was male domination and control (Genesis 3: 16), which is one of the characteristics of patriarchy. The expulsion of Eve and her mate from the garden signifies the inauguration of human culture, and here at its outset we find represented the division of labour between sexes; the work of reproduction falls to her and sexual subordination is its consequence.¹⁸

4. Patriarchy and the Suppression of the Feminine

The word 'patriarchy' comes from the Greek word Pater/ *Patros* (father) and *Arche* (origin, ruling, power or authority). Patriarchy is a form of social organization in which power is always in the hands of the dominant man or men. Today patriarchy can be described as an all pervasive set of attitudes that has dominated human beings for thousands of years. According to patriarchy, the male of the human species is the norm of humanity; the female is secondary, created for his service. It has institutionalized patterns of power to control and exclude those

¹⁷B. Caprio, *The Woman Sealed in the Tower*, New York: Paulist Press, 1982, cited in Pendanam, *Liberating the Feminine*, 55-56.

¹⁸Angela West, "Genesis and Patriarchy," *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 62, No. 727 (January 1981), 17-32, at 21.

it wishes to keep subservient. Women's experiences and insights have been by and large ignored by patriarchal cultures.

Patriarchy is a historic creation formed by men and women in a process which took nearly 2500 years to its completion. In its earliest form patriarchy appeared as the archaic state. The basic unit of its organization was the patriarchal family which both expressed and constantly generated its rules and values.

In its narrow meaning, patriarchy refers to the system, historically derived from the Greek and Roman law in which the male head of the household had absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members. Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources.¹⁹

The concept of patriarchy as debated by the radical feminists emphasizes a universal system of subordination where women are seen as victims, implying a biological basis for men's control over women. The Marxist feminists on the other hand have tried to analyze and understand the system of domination based on control over women's labour, which according to them was determined by the economic mode of production. The socialist feminists, while critiquing the Marxists, have tried to integrate their understanding on class and gender hierarchies and premised patriarchy as an important form of oppression which according to them determined the nature of relationship between class and gender.²⁰

¹⁹Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 239.

²⁰Anandhi S. and Arundhuti Roy Choudhury, "Patriarchy and Gender Relations: An Overview," in *Social Action*, Vol 44/2 (April-June 1994), 1- 14, 2.

In the context of India, caste, class and gender hierarchy have been the organizing principles of the Brahmanical social order. With the ushering in of colonialism, the ancient Hindu social order which defined women as impure, subordinated, and to be subjected to humiliating conditions of existence, were merely reinforcing along with the Western sexual stereo-types in which the political, socio-economic dominance of men over women were seen as a natural process.²¹

In patriarchal cultures, men identified feminine qualities only with women. Consequently they suppressed women and also the feminine within themselves. Feminine qualities were relegated to the back and masculine to the fore. With the suppression of feminine, the oppression of those on the periphery began. As a result today we have a broken and bleeding world – a society torn apart with divisions based on caste, class, sex, creed and colour. Individual rights have priority over the common good. Oppression of the weak and exploitation of the vulnerable has become the norm.

5. God's Dream of Creating a Community

According to Judeo Christian tradition, the foundational experience of the Israelites was the exodus experience. The Israelites who were suffering in Egypt as slaves were freed and were brought to a land flowing with milk and honey. God made a covenant with them, and accompanied them. God gave them the land to settle down and to flourish, and the laws and commandments to follow so that they will remain united to their God and to one another. Unlike other nations they did not have a king to rule over them since God Herself was ruling over them. But this situation did not last long. They too wanted to be like other nations. They asked for a king to rule over them.

Once the monarchy came to existence, they were no more a community, a tribal federation. Soon there were poor among them. They began to exploit the poor, the widows and the orphans. But God did not abandon them to their fate. God sent

²¹A. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, 4.

prophets to call them back to repentance and right living. The Prophets condemned the injustices and atrocities practiced against the vulnerable in the society (cf. Isaiah 1: 12-20; Amos 5: 21-24). But they often did not heed to the prophetic warning. As a result they lost their land, their temple and even their God and had to endure the hardship of being exiled into foreign nations. But God did not go back on God's promises. God sent his only Son to show the way and to fulfil God's dream of building a loving community.

6. Jesus, the Feminine Face of God

When Jesus arrived on the scene, he began with a surprising proclamation. It was about the arrival of the Reign of God. His vision was to create a just and humane society where equality, love, brother/sisterhood and fellowship will flourish. Jesus struck at the root of the patriarchal system which stood against the fulfilment of his dream. Through His words and deeds, Jesus proposed an alternative worldview where the feminine will be equally valued and recognized. He did not suppress the feminine. On the contrary he allowed it to blossom within himself.

One of the most important characteristics that Jesus espoused was compassion, a typically feminine quality. Mark's gospel opens with the theme of compassion. Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized with the rest of the people. Here is a "movement" on the part of Jesus "into the experience of the other (crowd) to be present in solidarity and communion of experience." That is compassion. Here Jesus shows "sensitivity, vulnerability to the affected by the experience of the other. That is what compassion implies. It implies also remedial action and involvement in the situation."²²

In Mark 2: 13-17 the compassion of Jesus tears down class walls and caste barriers and all elitist pretensions, and goes

²²Monika K. Hellwig, *Jesus, The Compassion of God*, Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier. Inc, 121, cited in Samuel Rayan, "Jesus: a Flesh-Translation of Divine Compassion," *Jeevadharma*, 26 No.153 (May 1996), 212-229, 213.

ahead building comradeship with 'outcasts' and 'sinners,' and rebuilding the honour and pride of the marginalized and the despised. His sympathies are with the *pariahs* of society and religion, and not with their overlords.²³ Healing and feeding are privileged places for the revelation of Jesus' compassion. We watch with wonder Jesus' motherly concern directing the child's parents to give her something to eat (Mark 5: 21-24, 35-43; Matthew 9: 18, 23-26; Luke 8: 40-42, 49-56).

Scholars point out that the biblical word for compassion, sympathy, pity, and mercy derive from a stem *rehem*, *rehamim* in Hebrew, and *splanchnon* in Greek denotes internal parts of a sacrificial animal, and later, the womb in particular. The womb was considered to be the seat and centre of tender affections. Basically the word suggests motherly feelings, mother's love, and the bond that unites those born of the same womb. Attributed to God, the suggestion is that God's love is familial: Yahweh is father/parent to Israel: "When Israel was a child I loved him; I called my son out of Egypt ... I was like someone lifting up an infant to his cheeks, and I bend down to feed him (Hosea 11)." Yahweh is mother to Israel (Isaiah 49: 15-16) or husband to Israel (Isaiah 54: 4-8; Hosea 1-3).²⁴

In analyzing the Hebrew texts, Phyllis Trible brings out its metaphoric potential:

... our metaphor lies in the semantic movement from a physical organ of the female body to a psychic mode of being. It journeys from the concrete to the abstract. "Womb" is the vehicle; "compassion," the tenor. To the responsive imagination, this metaphor suggests the meaning of love as selfless participation in life. The womb protects and nourishes but does not possess and control. It yields its treasure in order that wholeness and well-being may happen. Truly, it is the way of compassion.²⁵

²³Rayan, "Jesus: a Flesh-Translation of Divine Compassion," 216.

²⁴Rayan, "Jesus: a Flesh-Translation of Divine Compassion," 226.

²⁵Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, 33.

As a psychic mode of being, it is applied to both female and male. Above all, it is applied to God, e.g., Hosea 2: 23; Jeremiah 31: 20; Isaiah 49: 9-11, 13-15; 63: 15-16 and the phrase "merciful and gracious" found frequently in the Psalms. In Tribble's analysis, the most striking text is Jeremiah 31 that images God's love for Ephraim as a womb of compassion culminating in the radical reversal: "female surrounds man" (Jeremiah 31: 22).²⁶

In the synoptics, the word *splangchnizesthai* is frequently applied to Jesus. The noun has the root meaning of viscera and so the verb expresses the idea of being moved from within the deepest part of oneself by a profoundly felt emotion.²⁷ It is often translated as 'being moved with pity' but compassion catches better the connotation of personal involvement in suffering. Thus, Jesus has compassion on the people who crowd around him because of their ignorance (Mark 6:34), their hunger (Mark 8: 2), their infirmities (Matthew 14: 14; 20: 34; Mark 1: 41; 9: 22), their sorrow at the loss of a loved one (Luke 7: 13). Jesus also uses the word in his two greatest parables (Luke 10: 33; 15: 20).

Jesus lived the mystery of divine compassion by his swift and generous response to human needs and sufferings. Coming across human sorrow and need, Jesus is moved in depth, in his bowels, in his womb (Matthew 9:36; 14: 14; 15: 32; 20:34; Mark 1: 41; 6: 34; 8:2; Luke 7: 13). It seems natural then that Jesus should liken himself to a hen seeking to gather her chicks, or to a woman in labour; or to a mother fixing breakfast for her children, or even as bread of life which a mother's body becomes for the life of her children (Matthew 23: 37; Luke 13: 34-35; John 16: 20-22; John 6: 15, 50-58; Luke 22: 19-20).²⁸

7. The Reign of God as the New Community of Compassion

The term 'Reign of God' occurs well over hundred times in the

²⁶Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 50.

²⁷Michael L. Cook, S. J., "The Image of Jesus as Liberating for Women," *Chicago Studies*, vol. 27, No. 2, (August 1988), 136-150, 143-44.

²⁸Rayan, "Jesus: a Flesh-Translation of Divine Compassion," 227.

synoptic Gospels.²⁹ The Reign of God was Jesus' vision. It is a vision that has inspired countless men and women after him to live not just for themselves, but for their community and for God. It sums up the whole message of Jesus. In the parable of the banquet of God's Reign (Luke 14: 15-24; Matthew 22: 1-14), Jesus wanted to make perfectly clear that the reign of God belongs to the outcasts of his own religious community.³⁰

In spite of the extensive data on the Reign of God in the gospels, it is extremely difficult to grasp the full range of meaning attached to this powerful and evocative symbol. It is evident in the teaching of Jesus that the coming of the Reign of God into our world is an offer of grace and new life from God; in this way, the Reign of God is something that begins and ends with God. The eschatological aspect of this multi-layered symbol ensures that it cannot be exhausted by the images and expectations which arise from human experience; it is transcendent in origin and in destiny, and thus cannot be brought into being simply and solely by human efforts. The Reign of God announced by Jesus to some extent represents a radical discontinuity with the limitations of a world which has been tainted with sin and death. Paradoxically, The Reign of God also contains a profound continuity with present human experience.³¹

Most scholars would agree that the parables represent the authentic teaching of Jesus on the Reign of God. What is striking about the parables as a literary genre is that they often call into question the accepted structures of reality: they shatter our conventional way of experiencing and understanding the world, they startle the individual out of complacency, they open up the

²⁹Dermot A. Lane, *Christ at the Centre: Selected Issues in Christology*, New York: Paulist Press, 1991, 11.

³⁰C. S. Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 25.

³¹Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 21.

possibility of a new and different kind of living³² in the present, they "tease the mind into new perceptions of reality."³³

This coming of the Reign of God brings about a reversal of the values of this world. The world begins to look different and takes on a different complexion in the light of the imminent Reign of God. A change of heart and new set of priorities begins to emerge. The spirit of this reversal is best summed up in terms of the Beatitudes. In the presence of the Reign of God it is the poor in spirit that are rich, the peace-makers are called sons and daughters of God, the humbled are exalted, and those who mourn are blessed (Matthew 5: 3ff). One of the outstanding features of the preaching of Jesus on the Reign of God is the consistent emphasis that is placed on praxis both in the parables and in the rest of his teaching.³⁴

8. The *Abba* Experience of Jesus

There seems to be a connection between Jesus' particular experience of God as *Abba* and his proclamation of the Reign of God. Recent scripture studies have highlighted the centrality of God as Father in the ministry of Jesus and have suggested that the personal address of God as Father/*Abba* especially in prayer was an important part of the uniqueness of Jesus. God is referred to as Father some 170 times in the gospels: four times in Mark, fifteen in Luke, forty-two in Matthew and 109 in John.³⁵

According to Joachim Jeremias, when Jesus used the Aramaic term *Abba* he was deliberately using the language of a child and as such intended to communicate a sense of intimacy and informality with God. *Abba* is therefore more properly translated as the informal 'daddy' in contrast to 'Father.'³⁶ The proclamations of God as Father and the Reign of God are

³²E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus, An Experiment in Christology*, London: Collins, 1979, 169.

³³N. Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, 106, cited in Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 24.

³⁴Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 27.

³⁵Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 34.

³⁶Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 35.

proclamations about a God who is *radically relational*. The announcement of God as Father is spelt out socially in terms of the Reign of God and the proclamation of the Reign of God is grounded in Jesus' experience of God as Father. Further, when Jesus does talk about God as Father and the Reign of God, he does so in a way that transcends any traces of patriarchy and repudiates all forms of power-seeking domination.³⁷

The other factor in the ministry of Jesus which transcends patriarchy is his calling into being of a new community of a discipleship of equals. The setting up of a new alternative community of women and men by Jesus is closely connected to his experience of God as Father. Because there is one God who is Father of all, a new set of non-patriarchal relationships is introduced among those who acknowledge God as Father through their discipleship of Jesus. This new relationship among women and men transcends natural ties and as such is a direct consequence of Jesus' proclamation of the fatherhood of God. Indeed, when women and men relate to each other as sister and brother on virtue of this universal fatherhood of God, then the Reign of God is coming into being: "Looking around on those who sat about him, he said 'here are my mother and my brother. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother'" (Mark 3: 34-35).

One of the distinctive qualities therefore of the coming Reign of God announced by Jesus and inspired by his experience of God is this inclusive discipleship between young and old, rich and poor, insider and outsider, male and female. All are called without distinction to belong to the one inclusive/non-patriarchal family of God as Father. Thus Jesus can say to the disciples who make up this new alternative community of equals: "And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 23: 9). The source and origin of this new vision of women and men as sisters and brothers

³⁷Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 37.

living and working together under the Reign of God is Jesus' experience of God as Father.³⁸

7. Conclusion

The society in which we live today is characterized by division, violence, bloodshed, corruption, individualism, control, manipulation, and the like. It is far from the Reign of God vision proclaimed and practiced by Jesus. The suppression of the feminine with a simultaneous subjugation of women has contributed much of today's ills of our society. God's primordial intention of forming humanity into a community is being thwarted by the patriarchal values and attitudes.

By taking the human flesh, Jesus shows us the way to be an integrated human being. He gave equal importance to both the feminine and masculine dimensions of his psyche. As a result he could embody the compassion of God to the full and also treat women as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. His experience of God as *Abba* further enabled him to understand God in relational term which is very much a feminine approach.

Since the feminine qualities are by and large suppressed and are not allowed to come to the fore, we have created a society that is unjust and uncaring for one another. Liberation of the feminine is the need of the hour. It has to be set free both in men and women. Feminine qualities such as cooperation, compassion, nurturance, and relationality are needed to build up a just and compassionate society by countering the destructive values of competition, greed, selfishness, etc. which are so rampant in our globalized world of today.

Building a just and compassionate society can be done only when men and women allow the feminine within them to blossom and to flourish. Only when human beings allow

³⁸The revelation of God as Father must not be taken literally. The image of God as Father is symbolic and analogical. Like all symbols and analogies, it needs to be modified and enriched by other equally valid symbols and analogies such as God as Mother and God as Sister. See Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 39.

themselves to be moved with compassion like Jesus we can start building a just and humane society.

This vision of creating a just and compassionate society is already in the process. Women and men with a feminist vision are already contributing to this process. This can pick up momentum and reach its finality only when the feminine in the human psyche is equally valued by all and women are accepted as equal partners in church and society.