

## ***Gender Balancing our World:***



### **getting our faith traditions *fully* on board**

Did you watch *Half the Sky* this Fall? Did it stir in you a deep passion to do something to uplift women? Does your faith motivate you to work to create a better world? Consider giving with a “faith-lens” and a “gender-lens” this holiday season to create a more just world for girls and women.

### *The arc of the moral*

*universe is long,*

*but it bends*

*towards justice.*

~ Martin Luther King

BEYOND CHARITY, WHAT *UNIQUE* ROLE DO OUR FAITH TRADITIONS HAVE TO KEEP BENDING THE MORAL ARC TOWARDS JUSTICE FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD?

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*The people who walk in  
darkness will see a great light. For  
those who live in a  
land of deep darkness,  
a light will shine.*

Isaiah 9:2

part i:  
half the sky angst:  
what to do with it?



part ii:  
digging up the religious roots of  
our gender-imbalanced world



part iii:  
another world on her way:  
what is yours to do?



“ GENDER EQUALITY  
MUST BECOME  
A LIVED REALITY. ”  
—MICHELLE BACHELET

part i:  
half-the-sky angst:  
what to do with it?



A picture speaks a thousand words...

### Holiday Angst?

We've barely gobbled down our last bite of turkey and pumpkin pie before the familiar lines of carols begin to ring in our ears and warm our souls. *Joy to the world! Peace on earth! Good will to all! Let heaven and nature sing!* I don't know about you, but as I string up lights, pull out the advent wreath and boxes and boxes of ornaments and tangled lights, the lofty words of our beloved carols have a way of triggering a paradoxical mix of joy, generosity, and enlarged spiritual vision, yet also a fairly predictable mal-contentedness about the state of things.

How strange it is that Christmas carols can make me want both to buy an iPhone 5 and a Mac Airbook and in the same moment want to save the world? I admit that I keep Santa's Amazon elves very busy this time of year, yet in quiet moments the contradictions between the high ideals of the season and the harshness of our egregiously unjust world nag at my soul...

How does one reconcile the reality that while my kids wish and wish for iPods/iPads/phones, Xbox games and an endless stream of expensive gadgets, toys and designer clothes elsewhere over a billion humans on this planet spend most of their waking hours simply wishing for a few drops of clean water?

... Or that everywhere on our planet, whether in Cambodia or India or right here on our own doorsteps, 12-27 million people are caught in a web of slavery today and, according to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, three out of every four are female and over half are children?  
(<http://www.freedomcenter.org/slavery-today/>)

If you watched *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn this Fall, you've glimpsed the mind-numbing, heart-breaking pattern of violence and enslavement that the girl child absorbs around the world as part of her day-to-day reality. How can this be? In the year 2012?

***In the last half century alone, more women and girls have died as a result of gender discrimination than all the men who died in all the battles of the 20th century, and more girls were killed in anyone decade than all of those who died in the genocides of last century.***

***Did you know that over 10 times as many girls are currently being trafficked each year than African slaves were transported during the height of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade?***

### Gender Angst

The world's grim misogyny is on center stage for all to see. In its sheer scale and magnitude, and in all of its cruel manifestations, it is a blight on civilization and haunts our spirits. As my friend and minister Adele Calhoun described so poignantly, "watching *Half the Sky* was like a wrecking ball through my chest".

As I've watched friends, family, colleagues, people at church (and myself) awoken to the horrific humanitarian crisis which many are calling "femicide", I sense a growing "gender angst" in the air, particularly among women, a shared sense of disbelief and yes, anger, that despite all of the advances that women have made, the floor of basic human rights has dropped so dangerously low. That could be my daughter, my sister, my mother, my friend. That could be me.



Top-of-mind for many this holiday season is the shocking and pervasive gender injustice that continues to plague our planet. There is desperate sense of wanting, even needing, to do something to stand in solidarity with our sisters around the world. Books and movies like *Half the Sky* are raising awareness that there is much unfinished work to be done to overcome patriarchal traditions, ideas and cultural practices which continue to privilege males over females making females vulnerable to a whole cluster of human rights violations.

### women's rights are human rights

The humanitarian consequences of our gender-Imbalanced world are nothing new, what is new is our collective awareness of the magnitude of the problem not just as a "women's" issue, but as a very basic issue of human rights. It is hard to believe that this is a novel idea in 2012, but as Secretary Hilary Clinton described in her renowned speech at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, our world seems to need a collective reminder of the simple idea that "women's rights are human rights" and any abridgment of human rights is a concern of all of ours:

*It is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold into the slavery of prostitution.*

*It is a violation of human rights when women are doused with gasoline, set on fire and burned to death because their marriage dowries are deemed too small.*

*It is a violation of human rights when individual women are raped in their own communities and when thousands of women are subjected to rape as a tactic or prize of war.*

*It is a violation of human rights when a leading cause of death worldwide among women ages 14 to 44 is the violence they are subjected to in their own homes.*

*It is a violation of human rights when young girls are brutalized by*

the painful and degrading practice of genital mutilation.

*It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their own families, and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against their will.*

*If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, it is that human rights are women's rights - and women's rights are human rights. Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely - and the right to be heard.*

The question we are left with as we read all of these dismal statistics is what to do with all of this heightened awareness that just makes you feel bad? I have to admit that at times I just don't want to hear, read about, or watch one more depressing story of a girl or woman around the world that is treated like a slave or an animal or is killed for fighting for women's human rights. This was my reading this morning: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-bride-or-slave-the-girls-in-niger-who-are-both/>

If you have not yet developed your global gender awareness, I encourage you to watch *Half the Sky* and check out some of these websites (yes they are depressing but also highlight great momentum that is happening around the world to shift the gender tide) to get up the learning curve: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/half-the-sky/>  
<http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/>  
<http://www.girlup.org/>  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>  
<http://www.unwomen.org/>  
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/women-in-the-world.html>  
<http://www.ijm.org/our-work/injustice-today>  
<http://strongwomenstrongworld.org/>  
<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/wapppp/for-scholars/fast-facts>

This topic, I know, is not exactly merry or light, but do not fear, I will not just leave you in a dark ditch of despair. By the end of the article, I hope that you will feel some inspiration that change is happening that you can be apart of, but also a sense of trepidation that without concerted effort, each sector doing its part to keep bending the arc, it can easily bend backward, as we are seeing in many places around the world today.

***The arc of the moral universe is long  
but it bends towards justice.***

~ Martin Luther King

the arc is bending,  
every sector doing its part

As heavy and awful as the awareness of "femicide" is to hold, the "silver lining" is that it is giving the world a big kick in the butt to finish the unfinished business of the women's movement to create a world where the girl child does not "eat least and last", is not first to drop out of school when finances are short, is not married off as a child or be sent into the city to work in the sex industry or sold to a trafficker.

Everywhere there are unique cultural obstacles, yet across so many sectors, we are seeing a renewed global commitment to empowering girls/women to rise above cultural barriers and become more mainstreamed into all aspects of society. As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and so many voices like his describe, *Study after study has taught us that there is no tool more effective for development than the empowerment of women.*

The global development community has placed the empowerment of girls and women at the center of poverty alleviation efforts, economic and community development, and fighting a whole host of social ills. The most pressing humanitarian concern is to stop the violence, but the ultimate goal is more than just this, more than just building shelters and rehabilitation programs to "rescue" female victims from sex-trafficking and child marriage. What we want is a more gender-balanced world that treats girls and women as full equals in society. We want girls to grow up and develop their full human potential to be all that they can and to do their part to create a better world.

There is a renewed global consensus that without a healthy, empowered female half of the population, none of our other development and poverty alleviation goals will be achieved. "Gender empowerment" runs throughout the 10 Millennium Development Goals and is explicitly stated in goal #3: "to promote gender equality and empower women" <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>

Likewise, in the corporate sector there is a growing sense that gender balance is not only "the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do". Every sector has its role to play in bending the moral arc toward justice. *What about the religious sector? How has this dimension of our global culture—so powerful in shaping hearts and minds—contributed to the problem of gender oppression and thus is also a necessary part of the solution?*

**widen your faith-lens:**

As much as we'd rather be merry merry all season long, the candles we light and the twinkle lights we string remind us that just like the magi wandering in the dark looking for a light to guide them so too navigating the darkness of our hearts and our world is as much a part of the season as the light. "It is only in the darkness that you can see the light."

*Those who have eyes to see, let them see.  
Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!*  
~ Jesus



As a person of faith, if you are like me, you'd rather see your faith tradition as purely a force for good in the world. *For those who have eyes to see beyond our religious idealization, across the board religion—yes, your tradition too!—has been a mixed bag when it comes to women.* As a philanthropist investing in many faith-inspired non-profits working around the world, I continue to have faith in faith as a force for good in the world, but my radar screen is always in high alert and is tuned into how the religious sector is or isn't working to level the gender playing field in our world. *Is faith on board or not?*

On one hand, there are many many faith-based organizations doing amazing, herculean work to rescue, rehabilitate and empower girls and women to live healthy and productive lives. But if your eyes and ears are open to the invisible level of ideas and attitudes, there are still diminishing messages being sent out into the world by our faith traditions which continue to perpetuate a gender-based caste system which gives more value, privilege and power to males over females.

It is a sad but true reality that pretty much the only voices (other than rap music, pornographers, pimps, and johns) still advocating a subordinate role for females are religious voices. Our faith traditions embody many of our highest ideals as a collective human family and have inspired great feats of justice and social change, yet somehow when it comes to girls and women many of these ideals don't seem to fully apply.

**Can our world's women ever fully achieve real and lasting human equality without our faith traditions fully on board?**

Not that religion is to blame for all of our gender problems, but it is a plain fact that all of our world's religious traditions grew up in patriarchal cultural soil, were written by men for men, and have not from their beginnings have not seen women as fully human with fully developed minds and souls. In fact, in our holy books, we see an abundance of gender-based violence and we see how closely related slavery and female oppression has been throughout the millennia. Many religious traditions have made great strides toward working through patriarchal underpinnings, but do we not still see the imprint on the deeper layers of our collective human psyche of a patriarchal gender ranking system?

God  
Man  
Woman

**How does this invisible gender caste system linger on in our collective human psyche?**

**What have been the collective humanitarian consequences of this worldview?**

**How are religiously sanctioned ideas of gender hierarchy**

**militating against all of the amazing progress that is being done around the world to liberate and empower girls/women from enslaving ideas and practices?**

**As people of faith who want with all of our heart to see girls and women thrive to their full potential around the world, what is our unique role to play in cleaning up our world's collective gender baggage?**

The last frontier of the women's movement is not just humanitarian, it is getting beneath the surface to dig up the deeply entrenched thought patterns which have built up over millennia which give males a presumption to power over females and create conditions ripe for violence and human rights abuses. Whether explicitly "religious", a faith-lens helps to see and address root causes. What is a "faith-lens" you may be thinking?

**from charity to impact**

A "lens", as Jackie Vanderbrug, a pioneer in the gender-lens impact investing field, describes a lens as a "viewfinder" which helps you both to see *more of the landscape* and to hone in on what is yours uniquely to do in this world. You can't do everything, but you can do something. A lens aligns your head and your heart and your passions (and your anx!) with your giving

and with the needs of the world.

A lens helps to channel and translate good will into tangible social impact. A lens helps you see beyond the surface of things to the deeper roots of the problem. A lens helps you see the interconnections between things and cross-sectional movements that are galvanizing resources, bringing people together, and creating impact. Using a lens helps to keep your eyes on the trajectory of change, however slow, that is happening in our world. Finding that current of change and taking your place in it is a source of joy beyond any of the materialism of the season.

A *faith-lens* can spring from religious faith, but more broadly it is a way of seeing with the heart, expanding ones vision of Reality to see both the visible and the invisible dimensions that are always intertwined. A faith-lens is an eye to what God is doing in the world to heal and make whole and an eye that looks for what is yours uniquely to do in the world. A faith-lens sees the light in even the darkest places. A faith-lens very simply is the larger metaphysical framework which sees the "hidden wholeness" (Thomas Merton) of all things as they are meant to be and the light from within each of us that recognizes the light within each person and seeks its full expression.

As my awareness of the overlapping problems of trafficking and gender-based violence has increased, my faith-lens is on alert at all times trying to peel back the layers of the onion to get to the "invisible" why and how of our misogynistic, violent world. Gender cuts through everything, through nature, through our most intimate relationships, through our collective social structures. In many ways, gender lies at the very core of Life and what it means to be human... Our Creator chose to make us male or female and somehow this "otherness" and complementarity goes right to the core of our existence and to the Mystery of Life. Thus, gender is fundamentally a spiritual domain. Thus, the work of gender equality is a deeply spiritual matter. Thus, there are no simple silver bullet answers to our world's gender woes. We need a faith-lens to see all of the complexities, nuances, paradoxes, and the interconnectedness of various dimensions of both the problems and the solutions.



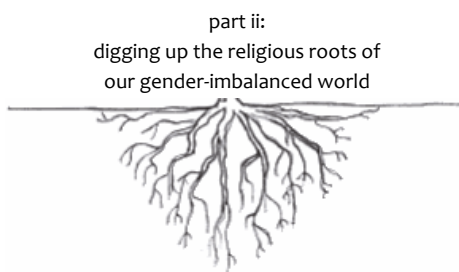
**holiday philanthropy**

Non-profits raise much of their operating budgets for the year during the holiday season, giving us more than enough opportunities to do work out our holy angst and do our small part to spread some good will and shalom around the world. Today, giving is much more sophisticated than dropping a few bills in a red bucket at the grocery store. Philanthropy has moved beyond doling out "charity" and now is seen as investing in social change. Using philanthropic lingo, the first step to "giving smart" this

holiday season is *being intentional about what “lenses” you will put on to sort through all of the appeals*. Don't let any holiday angst turn you into a grumpy old scrooge, find a way to listen to it, channel the angst into action, and like the grinch, let your heart enlarge in human solidarity with our sisters around the world.

*I will never be able to find myself if I isolate myself from the rest of [hu}mankind as if I were a different kind of being.*

~ Thomas Merton



*Prayers nice...  
but if you want to change the world,  
grab yourself a shovel!*

#### giving with a gender-lens

It is easy to feel paralyzed by the barrage of end-of-the-year holiday appeals. You want to save the world and create peace on earth, but where do you start? Should you buy the goat in the World Vision catalog or water for a village or tuition to send a kid to school or just drop your pittance in the red Salvation bucket at your grocery store?

No one program or organization has a monopoly on goodness or effectiveness, but let me shamelessly put in a plug to consider directing your holiday philanthropy toward what I believe is a particularly good and smart investment, a gift that will keep giving, not one organization per se, but a global movement is generating a whole web of positive changes to create a more just world: on top of your “faith-lens”, consider putting on a “**gender-lens**” this holiday season and give to what has been called the “girl effect” which in development circles is a term for a macro gender-balancing going on in our world today.

*You may be thinking, a faith-lens and a gender-lens? Do those go together or are they inescapably in conflict?* In a generation that many consider to be “post-feminist”, “gender equality”, “gender justice” and “gender empowerment” (whatever terms you want to use!) have become hot topics today. Women’s struggle for equality is far from finished and in many ways is moving beyond “feminism” to a shared humanitarian concern. Unlikely “feminists”, including evangelical Christians, are reading books like *Half the Sky* and are awakening to a new desire to act on behalf of girls and women around the world.

A promising movement in the field of international development and philanthropy has been the integration of a “gender-lens” to address the roots of the distinctly “feminine face” of poverty which makes females vulnerable to violence and abuse. Despite much progress of the women’s movement, deeply entrenched patriarchal gender norms and systems are still at play in our world,

creating imbalances across the gender divide in the distribution of resources, food, opportunities, agency, power, voice, dignity, health and safety.

As described on the UNWomen website, “The majority of the 1.5 billion people living on 1 dollar a day or less are women. In addition, the gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has continued to widen in the past decade, a phenomenon commonly referred to as “the feminization of poverty”. Worldwide, women earn on average slightly more than 50 % of what men earn.

(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/s1.htm>)

A gender-lens is simply an eye to how some policy or practice or idea contributes to or detracts from the full human flourishing and equality of both genders. Giving with a combined faith and gender lens asks how does faith/religion operate on the larger world terrain to either empower women and level the gender playing field or to further entrench existing cultural patriarchal gender norms?

#### disempowering ideas & their consequences

So many faith-based organizations are doing herculean work around the world, but I remain perplexed by what to me seems like the proverbial white elephant in the room: so many faith-inspired organizations that partner with churches are themselves not 100% on board with girls/women’s equality. No religious organization I know advocates violence against women, but...

*What sort of gender messages are our faith traditions today sending out into the world about the relative worth, agency and innate power of the girl child? Her place in the world? And who she will become?*

The sad but true reality is that religion in various ways, in various degrees, continues to perpetuate a secondary role for females in the family and in society. Many faith traditions have worked through their patriarchal orientation to embrace the full human equality of men and women, but change around the world is slow, particularly in places where religious fundamentalism is on the rise.

Underlying much of the enslaving gender-based violence and human rights violations around the world is a deeply entrenched, religiously sanctioned gendered power imbalance that is seen as an ideal to be worked toward, not as a problem to be solved.

I am continually shocked to see faith inspired organizations seeking to rescue girls and women from trafficking and domestic abuse yet still holding onto a benevolent yet paternalistic view of gender which circumscribes women’s power and place in society. At a recent annual meeting of a Christian relief and development organization that works closely with churches around the world, I was amazed to see that many of their church partners do not allow women to serve on their elder boards and still advocate for a hierarchical view of male leadership/female submission in society, the church, and the family.

Despite all the forces of modernization in our world, religion continues to exert a powerful influence on our deeper attitudes, values, and ways of relating and is uniquely positioned to lead the way in the desperately needed change of mind and heart to make

# “IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES... (Plato)



## & BAD IDEAS CAN HAVE LETHAL CONSEQUENCES.”

George Weigel, American Catholic theologian  
(photo of a 20 year old woman named Runa, scar on her face was made by a pimp.)

gender equality truly a lived reality. Without our faith traditions fully on board, will we ever fully achieve a gender-balanced world where men and women, girls and boys live and work and relate side-by-side as full human equals? I hope for a world where our faith traditions are leading the way with a clear and unambiguous spiritual ideal of gender equality rather than lagging behind with literalistic interpretations of our holy books which miss the forest for the trees.

Why is it that when it comes to basic justice for girls/women, change is so exasperatingly slow? How can we get our faith-based ideas and practices more fully onboard with gender justice? Can we work a little bit harder to offer our violent and hurting world an unambiguous spiritual ideal for human equality? Is this not the best gift we can give humanity?

How do you see the world through a faith and a gender lens? My faith/gender-lens on the world wavers between hope and despair. What troubles me more than anything is that lingering patriarchal religious attitudes are militating against all the collective work that is being done across so many sectors to create a level playing field for both genders to thrive as human beings. Very simply, as I heard a friend in Christian philanthropy say, if you want to be part of the solution, a good place to start is to stop being part of the problem.

To me, investing with a “gender-lens” means more than just doling out charity but leaving worn out ideas in tact that prop up an invisible gender caste system in our world. Wearing a gender-lens means *thinking, doing and investing* in efforts which *bend the moral arc* toward justice by addressing the disempowering ideas that manifest in disempowering and inhumane practices which devalue and exploit females around the world.

*How can we, how can you, bring out into the world the higher side of our faith traditions which stands for equality and justice for all human beings, male and female alike?*

*What is the role of the religious community in transforming the underlying patriarchal attitudes that still exist around the world which treat females as the “second sex”?*

There are no silver bullets, but, as I will try to argue, in this article, correcting the gender imbalance in our world gets to the roots of many other imbalances and problems in our world and can pay large dividends. What is good for girls and women, is good for the world, good for humankind, and good for the planet. Social change happens slowly on many different dimensions...

*What is yours to think, to ask, to do, & to give this holiday season to create a more just, gender-balanced world?*

Whatever “faith-lens” you wear in this holiday season, consider how these ideals apply to gender justice. There are many faith-based charities out there you can support, but a finely tuned “gender-lens” will help you decipher which ones are not only helping to rescue female victims but also seeking to change the underlying attitudes and structures which disempower females as “the second sex” and create conditions which inflame gender-based violence.

### femicide as a continuum of day-to-day violence

If the violence was just bad guys being bad guys that would be bad enough. But what we see around the world today is a level of violence and power imbalance *normalized* in our cultural patterns. What we are talking about is not just random acts of violence that happen to be directed at women, it is a particular form of violence that has a pattern to it, one of power and dominance leading to a host of cruel forms of exploitation.

What exactly is this barbaric sounding thing we call “femicide”? Very simply, it is the very pervasive and systematic killing and abuse of women and girls that exists on a day-to-day basis around the world. “Gender-related killings are not isolated incidents which arise suddenly and unexpectedly,” describes UNWomen Executive Director, “but are the ultimate act in a continuum of violence. They are the tip of the iceberg, rooted in centuries of discrimination and inequality between men and women, resulting from impunity, inaction and tolerance for violence against women and girls.”

The scale of the violence, and it’s eery normalization as a regular feature of girls and women’s lives around the world, at times seems so massive and so deeply entrenched that it is hard to get ahead of the tide. In *Half the Sky*, Wu Dunn and Kristof capture the pandemic of gender-based violence in a personal journalistic style that brings the global scourge of “femicide” right to the doorsteps of the heart: \* 15-40 -year-old women are more likely to be maimed or killed from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined \* Between 30% and 60% of women in most countries have been physically or sexually assaulted by a boyfriend or husband

- \* An Indian girl dies from discrimination every four minutes
- \* A bride-burning takes place once every two hours
- \* During the Civil War in Liberia, 90% of the girls and women over the age of 3 were sexually abused
- \* There are at least so-called 6000 honor killings a year
- \* At least 3 million women and girls, and a few girls, are sexual slaves
- \* Every ten seconds a girl has her genitals



mutilated

\* Every year, an estimated 10 million girls worldwide are married before they turn 18, usually with no say in when or whom they marry. ([www.girlsnotbrides.org](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org))

As shocking as the statistics are above, they do not spring out of thin air. It is not an accident that most of the world's trafficking victims today are female and receive less quality health care, nutrition, education, etc than males. They arise from layer upon layer, century upon century of *enslaving ideas, enslaving practices and an unequal distribution of power that has created the world into a large human pyramid. On many levels, our world's thought patterns and social structures are becoming flatter and less top down, more like a sphere than a pyramid that sorts people out by accidents of birth. But changing macro structures is slow, some how with gender particularly slow.*

### a dangerously low view of women



Young mother in East Azerbaijan Province being buried to be stoned to death for "fornication while married"

As women, we have indeed come along long way since the days of the Hammurabi Code<sup>1</sup> when we, along with racial minorities, were codified as chattel to be protected, bartered, and sold. Many of us are part of religious traditions which have vestiges of this patriarchal social ordering of women as the "second" sex, but by and large as Americans living in the 21<sup>st</sup> c.—whether one identifies with the feminist movement or not, whether one is religious or not, regardless of one's political affiliation—we are products of a different view of humanity, a different world view, one which revolts against any notion of "second"-class citizen, slavery or a human "caste system" in which any one group of people—whether it be a certain race, religion, ethnic group or gender—is given legal or cultural power to control or rule over another.

As women, most of us see our story as part of this larger unfolding human struggle for freedom and human equality. Like most American women, I have always taken for granted that women's equality is moving forward... Ideas rule the world, said Plato. As humans, what separates us from animals is the power of our minds to create the world around us. This capacity has long been seen as what makes us "God-like," i.e. *made-in-the-image-of-God*. "Ideas have consequences and some ideas can lead to brutal outcomes", says Mimi Haddad, President of an organization called Christians for Biblical Equality which helps Christians around the world to work through troublesome gender passages to interpret

<sup>1</sup> For more information on how the Hammurabi gender codes of ancient Mediterranean culture influenced world religions, see <http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/d/267/whm.html> and [http://history-world.org/Civilization,%20women\\_in\\_patriarchal\\_societies.htm](http://history-world.org/Civilization,%20women_in_patriarchal_societies.htm)

the Bible as promoting a trajectory of human equality.

"The most prominent indicator of whether a female will be sold to a brothel, killed as a fetus, abused in her marriage or family, or denied a place of decision making in her community or marriage", says Haddad, is determined not by her gender, but by the value we place on females as a whole." Societies that value females as much as males have higher female survival rates and a higher civility index in general.

*Societies with greater equality between men and women are healthier, safer and more prosperous.*  
<http://theelders.org/equality-girls-women>

Like all efforts to promote justice, gender justice begins with an idea—that male and female human beings are born with equal value and equal rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Gender injustice likewise begins with an idea—the devaluation of females as subordinate, submissive, less worthy of freedom, equality, agency, a "lesser than" secondary gender. As people of faith, we need to make a decision, which is it? The question to ask, in my humble opinion, the default question is not *why gender equality*, but rather *why not gender equality?*

Sometimes it takes stepping into another culture or religion to see how "ideas" literally create a *script* which is played out on the *stage of life*. I've traveled to Cambodia a few times with a donor cohort engaged in anti-trafficking efforts there and many of the leaders we have met with will take the time to make a connection between the violence and discrimination against women with ancient cultural/Buddhist proverbs which still linger in the collective psyche of Cambodia.

Most of the younger generation living in urban areas does not still hold to these traditional gender codes, but as Chak Sopheap describes in "Women's Rights in Cambodia: breaking up with old traditions" (<http://futurechallenges.org/local/women's-rights-in-cambodia-breaking-up-with-old-traditions/>) gender norms are so closely linked to what it means to be a "good Cambodian" that even after the idea itself is discarded as being out-of-date, the cultural sway of these traditional gender norms continues to hold great power over the culture making change very slow: "In the recent past, Cambodia was a traditional society where women had a particular and defined role with a limited social life. There are various traditional codes of conduct for women as described in proverbs, folktales and novels, especially in *Chbab Srey*, "Women Code of Conduct," on how women should behave. Here are some excerpts of *Women Code of Conduct*: "Another flame is your husband who you stay with forever You should serve well don't make him disappointed Forgive him in the name of woman; don't speak in the way that you consider him as equal No matter what happen we have to wait to listen with the bad word (even if he say something bad you have to listen) "Women are supposed to stay at home, and always behave quietly and sweetly," otherwise it will bring bad luck to family.

"A man is gold; a woman is a white piece of cloth." When dropped into mud, piece of cloth never regains its purity regardless how often it is washed. However, the gold can be cleaned and it will always shine."

In an article entitled "Cambodia: Girls Discarded like Soiled Linen" (<http://worldpulse.com/magazine/columns/community-voices/cambodia-girls-discarded-like-soiled-linen>), Sarvina Kinag

describes the devaluation of the feminine that has occurred from these traditions being passed down from one generation to the next:

“There is a proverb in Cambodia that asserts that men are like gold, women like a fresh white piece of linen. Even if gold is put in the fire, it remains unharmed. A white piece of linen, as soon as it has one blemish, is no longer of any use to anyone. The idea that girls and women are disposable commodities still prevails in Cambodian society, aggravated by the disproportionate value placed on virginity. Even if a girl is drugged and raped, her value as a desirable wife becomes nil. The victim is held responsible and she is burdened with the shame of having brought dishonor to the family.”

The female wreckage in Cambodia and around the world does not just spring out of thin air, but rather stems from a long cultural history of patriarchal ideas, traditions stories, myths, customs that devalue, dehumanize, and disempower females as the “second” sex. As humans, what separates us from the animal kingdom is our rational capacity to conceive of an IDEA which shapes how we behave in this world, and how we live together as a human family. Ideas create reality. As people of faith, does not the truth of this apply equally to us: religious ideas carry extra weight weight as they provide divine sanction to cultural practices and imprint the deep wells of the collective human psyche.

Tradition is like a cassette tape playing in our psyches sometimes even after we stopped consciously listening to the music. What gender codes lurk in your subconscious mind? Giving you as a male certain presumptions to power and a more entitled place in the world? Or you as a female a tendency toward a lower view of yourself and a more limited sense of agency and power? How has religion played into this? The good news is that tradition is not static. Religious traditions surrounding gender codes are in fact not uniform but rather are more like a composite of ideas and practices which even within our holy books show movement and progression. Just as our religious ideas and traditions have contributed to the idea of gender hierarchy so too can our religious ideas and traditions can help to transform these ideas.

As we know from religion’s mixed history on human rights issues like slavery, civil rights, and apartheid, not all religious ideas are created equal, some reflect and reinforce the higher side of our human nature and inspire deeds of great compassion, justice and creative brilliance; others have been used to justify many forms of injustice and human atrocity and reflect and reinforce our lower, fallen side that seeks it’s own advantage at the expense of others. While most reasonable people of faith are not advocating violence against girls and women, **what responsibility do we have to look within our traditions to reflect on the humanitarian consequences of our gender norms which have even in subtle ways relegated women to a “lesser than” category of human beings?**

*How do we change the hierarchical paradigm of gender which tends to give one gender a presumption to power over the other and in some way encourages, or at a minimum allows for, the use of violence as a normal way of resolving conflict and functioning?*

*How do religious ideas of female subordination mix with other cultural factors to contribute to a devaluation of girls and women which makes them vulnerable to violence?*

**a tenuous gender terrain:  
which way will the arc bend?**

As I look out onto the world with my “gender-lens” engaged, I am perplexed at the contradictory gender landscape of our world today. *How did we get to this point wherein 2012 women’s basic human rights are still hanging in the balance? Are things moving forward or backwards for women?* The best word to describe our current gender terrain is “tenuous.”

***“The role and rights of women their freedom and equality and dignity — is the unfinished business of the 21st c.”*** ~ Secretary of State Hilary Clinton

Gender norms are in a state of flux moving both backwards and forwards. Women are rising up around the world to be full participants in society and claim their full and equal status as human beings, yet in my travels and encounters with women’s rights activists around the world, there is a growing sense that women are encountering an opposing force in society, a re-trenching of male presumption to power and “traditional” family values, which seems bent on excluding, marginalizing, and keeping women in a secondary place in society.

In our shifting gender sands, today we have the highest number of female heads of states than ever before (20 [http://www.filbustercartoons.com/charts\\_rest\\_female\\_leaders.php](http://www.filbustercartoons.com/charts_rest_female_leaders.php)), and gender parity is progressing on so many fronts yet today more women are hiding beneath burkas, honor killings are on the rise, sex-trafficking/prostitution are one of the most lucrative global businesses, female genital mutilation, child marriage and renting/selling a girl’s body are acceptable practices. *How can this be?*



“Untouchable women who have taken control of the granite quarry in which they used to labour for less than \$1 day. They now employ their husband.” [www.facebook.com/WomenHoldUpHalfTheSky](http://www.facebook.com/WomenHoldUpHalfTheSky)

Watching the *Half the Sky*, you can feel the tenuousness of the girl child’s plight. *How can these things still be happening today in the 21<sup>st</sup> c.? Are people really still doing, saying & thinking such things? And too often sanctioned by religion and “tradition”? How can it be that in 2012 something called “femicide” exists?*

I admit I have a heightened gender-lens and a host of blogs and websites feeding me a steady diet of depressing misogyny which seems to know no bounds, but it seems that almost every day there is some troubling “gender” story in the news or right on my own doorsteps that makes me feel things sliding backwards for women:

~ a movement in Egypt to move the minimum age of marriage from 18 to 9 years old

~ a 14 Pakistani year old girl shot on her way to school for being an “infidel” standing up for the rights of girls



- ~ a recent "honor" killing of a young woman by her husband and in-laws for dressing inappropriately... in Canada
- ~ Israeli women forced to sit in the back of the bus, not allowed to sing in public or receive a professional award in a mixed audience, and cloaked in Jewish "burkas"
- ~ a young woman in Afghanistan jailed for being raped and then asked to marry her rapist
- ~ a Moroccan girl commits suicide after being forced to marry her rapist who abused her for 5 months after they were married
- ~ grisly stories of girls being "given" or "taken" as human bartering chips to fueling clans
- ~ female activists in Egypt forced to undergo "virginity" tests and brutally stripped and beaten in public by law enforcement
- ~ a government-appointed council in Afghanistan scaling back its support for women to advance peace talks with the Taliban, urging the strict application of a conservative, literalist interpretation of Islamic law requiring women must wear the veil and are forbidden from mixing with men in the work place or traveling without a male chaperone
- ~ pictures of a strikingly all-male congressional panel to discuss female contraception... in the USA
- ~ conservative radio talk show host calling women "sluts" and "prostitutes" for using birth control... in the USA
- ~ a nursing mother in Georgia kicked out of church for "lewd behavior"... in the USA
- ~ a growing cadre of neo-Reform preachers proudly endorsing a "masculine Christianity" and exclusive male leadership in the church and family... in the USA
- ~ two major Protestant denominations holding pastor's conferences on the topic of exclusive male leadership and what they call "Biblical Manhood"... in the USA
- ~ a well-regarded Ivy League campus ministry excluding women from leadership positions... in the USA
- ~ painful personal stories of young working mothers having to absorb family and social scorn for violating "biblical" gender roles... in the USA
- ~ a new documentary showing shockingly high rates of sexual violence in the military that have been largely ignored... in the USA
- ~ a news commentator suggesting that women in the military are asking for such treatment... in the USA
- ~ A teenage Muslim girl stoned to death under 'Sharia law' after taking part in a beauty contest in Ukraine
- ~ a new policy that requires women visitors to an Afghan prison to undergo dehumanizing vaginal searches: "We have been strictly ordered to search genital areas of all the women who are visiting the prisoners." ~ a prison guard in Kabul
- ~ Afghanistan's Ulema Council, the country's highest religious authority, released a "code of conduct" that makes it permissible for a man to beat his wife under "certain circumstances"
- ~ a disillusioning discovery that three prominent churches that traveled to Africa together on a celebrated missions trip with a Christian NGO together had a ratio of 38:0 men: women on their elder boards
- ~ a summer camp where women are still not allowed to pray or speak in the Sunday morning service
- ~ Pat Robertson advising a husband to take his wife to Saudi Arabia where laws allow for "disobedient" wives to be beaten

As distressing as all these violent shocking stories are over there in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, I have to admit that my soul has been as

distressed or more by what seems like a resurgence of male hierarchical attitudes right here in my own backyard. Holding onto a worldview which elevates masculinity over femininity manifests in various forms, from benevolent to malevolent, but at the core is it not all part of the same patriarchal continuum? Anytime you diminish a group of people, even slightly, you make them more at risk for being exploited

the bridle of submission:  
slavery as a continuum



This summer, I had the privilege of going to a dude ranch with my family. We learned to ride horses and also care for them. One of my least favorite jobs was taking off the bridle from the horses mouth and around its snout. One of my most favorite things to do there was not to ride the horses but walk by them grazing freely in the pastures. My least favorite thing to do was put the bridle in my horse's mouth and upon taking it out seeing how relieved the horse was to be free of something controlling its will. Not even animals are made for submission.

While at the ranch, I was reading a book by Larry Crabb which idealizes female "submission" as the true nature of femininity and "headship" as the true nature of masculinity. I could not help but ask myself, is this really the best we can do for human gender relations? I was also reading a book called *A Walk Across the Sun* by Corban Addison which depicts in graphic terms two young sisters from India swept into the global sex trade after the tsunami hit. In this book, you see what human "submission" looks like in graphic form, one will subordinating itself to the will of another, like a horse to its rider.

Whatever religious language you dress it up in, is not patriarchy in all its forms, whether benevolent or exploitative, at its core the same thing? An imbalanced gender scale which subordinates one will beneath another. Even my horse would rather be free and frolic in the fields than forced to be in submission. Are we meant to live side-by-side as equals or in a hierarchy with one gender dominating the other?

“ GENDER EQUALITY  
MUST BECOME  
A LIVED REALITY. ”  
—MICHELLE BACHELET

part iii:  
another world on her way:  
what is yours to do?



*"Another world is not only possible, she's on the way and, on a quiet day, if you listen very carefully you can hear her breathe."*

~ Arundhati Roy

#### another world on her way?

In many ways, it is a great time to be born into this world as a girl child. Girls today relative to other generations have so many more options in life to grow and develop and chart their course. Progress has been made toward gender parity in many professions. Three centuries since the advent of the women's movement, on so many levels, change has happened and continues to happen to rebalance the gender-imbalance of our world.

Overall, the idea of females as being in any way the "second sex" is passé and where it does exist it is seen as a sign of cultural backwardness. Gender equality has become a taken-for-granted goal of most sectors of society. Indeed, in the words of Arundhati Roy, "**ANOTHER WORLD IS ON HER WAY**"... we have not yet arrived at the ideal of a perfectly gender-balanced world, but we are on our way to leveling the playing field of life for the girl child and the boy child to grow up together side-by-side in a fair and just world.

*What is this other world that is on her way?* It is world where the gender pecking order that has for millennia valued and empowered masculinity over femininity has been transformed into a more level playing field where mutuality, shared power, and complementarity characterize how we relate across the gender line rather than a dehumanizing pecking order. It is world where both the girl and the boy child are born with an equal shot at living a productive, empowered life; where both are equally valued and empowered to chart their course in life and develop their full potential.

Very simply, it is a world where there is not a #1 and a #2 gender. Period.

Is that too much to ask? I don't think so. The girl child today has her challenges, but she is strong and empowered and is leading the way forward toward a more fully human, gender-balanced world, not only for her own sake, but for all of us, for the health and healing of our planet.

I don't know about you, but as I look out onto the world with both my gender-lens and my faith-lens on, I see such vast contradictions that are hard to make sense of: strong currents of empowerment make you feel like things are moving forward for girls and women, yet beneath the surface of all this progress there are currents which are knocking women backwards.

Yet, I do believe the moral arc is bending toward justice. I believe we are at a precipice, a moment in time where the girl child—womankind—is rising up, she is empowered and strong. The so-called "girl-effect" has transformed the face of global

development putting the empowerment of girls and women as the lynchpin of economic development, poverty alleviation, disease prevention, and of creating a more just world. Today women all over the world in every sector of society women are rising up to break glass ceilings and we are living with the highest ever total number (20) of female heads of state. Listen to the exalted hope we have for the empowered girl child/women to transform our world:

*Investing in women is the single best way to reduce inequality and drive economic growth.* ~Goldman Sachs

*Forget India, forget china, forget the internet, economic growth in the next decade will be led by women.*

~The Economist

*Gender equality is smart economics.* ~The World Bank

*Study after study has taught us that there is no tool more effective for development than the empowerment of women.*

~ UN Secretary General Kofi Annan

I also look around me at how amazing women are holding up way more than "half the sky" to raise their children, hold family life together, make a living, volunteer doing good in society, and some how in the midst of it all, continue their own human development. The "girl child" is not just a child but rather is the unique feminine force of nature within each of us that deep down knows it's power and strength and grace, despite millennia of oppression, and that it has work to do to heal and create a better world.

I see this feminine power in the faces of women activists and NGO leaders I have had the privilege of interacting with. Women are rising up and are doing incredible work not only to empower girls and women but to build bridges of peace and justice in our polarized, violent world. The book *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation At War* by Leymah Gbowee, the recent noble peace prize recipient, captures powerfully what female empowerment around the globe looks like: women rising up out of oppressive, violent conditions to claim their own power and use it to create peace in the midst of conflict and rebuild a more just world. Empowering women is not just good for women but all of humanity.

Despite all the grim violence that suggests otherwise, change is happening, one step forward, two steps backwards, not without its tumult yet we still cling to the hope that **ANOTHER WORLD IS ON HER WAY**... where the girl child is not just safe, but fully valued, empowered, and thriving. The girl effect is transforming our world and is putting the girl at the center of creating a better world. This youtube says it all: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e8xgF0tVg>

The clock is ticking. Change won't happen on its own. it needs our collective buy-in and willingness to look within our ways of thinking and doing and make some changes, including getting our religious traditions *unambiguously* on board with gender equality, both in principle and in practice, to elevate the *dangerously low, disempowered view of girls/women*, often fueled by religion, that is wreaking havoc on the bodies and souls of the girl child.

### the girl child: a new global priority



This past Fall on Oct 11, 2012 the world observed the first **International Day of the Girl Child**, a day designated by the UN to recognize the unique human rights challenges and potential of girls around the world. Groups around the world used the day to highlight efforts to overcome traditional social norms and practices which continue to privilege males over females and create conditions that make girls and women subject to a whole cluster of forms of discrimination, human rights violations, and violence.

The girl child, that seed that grows into womankind... Everywhere she wears different clothes, encounters different customs and social structures, is formed within various faith traditions, walks a different journey, carries different burdens, different dreams and through all of this she receives different cultural messages about her worth and place in society. Yet everywhere, she is the same. She is your daughter, your sister, she will be your mother and your grandmother. She is you.

The intent of this day was to celebrate the girl child and all she is and has to offer the world as an untapped agent of change. The limelight is on girls and women around the world less as victims than as change agents.

The world's escalating gender-based violence is a wake-up call to our basic human empathy to kick into higher gear and create a better world for the girl child to grow and thrive and know her own equality as a full participant in society. *Think about your particular religious context... about your particular sphere of influence... What is yours to do to create a more level gender playing field for the girl and the boy child to grow up in? How can you help create an environment where men and women share power and are free to exercise their human gifts as they feel called?*

### going upstream

In the "business" of social-change philanthropy, there is an effort not only to deal with symptoms but also to go "up stream" to root causes. It is clear that women empowering themselves is not alone going to stop the massive tide of gender-based violence nor are efforts to one-by-one "rescue" and "rehabilitate" girls and women from abuse. Something else has to shift or there will always be a line up of new potential victims.

The further you swim up stream, whatever the gender problem you are dealing with, you see the same ugly root: **male presumption to power** which leads to exploitation. As described in a report called *Mapping of Faith-based Responses to Violence Against Women and Girls in the Asia-Pacific Region*, violence against women is inextricably linked to cultural norms which give more power to men.

"Violence against women constitutes 'any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether

occurring in public or in private life.' It is a consequence of gender inequality and discrimination and is shaped by the interaction of a wide range of social, cultural, economic and political factors. By intention or effect, violence against women serves to perpetuate male power and control and is sustained by a culture of silence, and denial of the seriousness of the physical and psychological consequences of abuse."

Anyone working to shelter or rehabilitate women caught in the web of sex-trafficking or any form of gender-based violence knows that, as this report describes, "violence against women is inextricably linked to gender-based inequalities". Violence, though not always, premeditated, has the effect of keeping someone or some group in a powerless place in society. There is no way around this reality, violence against women is inextricably linked to gender-based inequalities and power asymmetry which gives men a presumption of control over women.

When women and girls are expected to be generally subservient, they are vulnerable to neglect, abuse, and general marginalization in society. When men and boys are expected to be dominant and given too much power, they tend to resort to violence. It does not cease to shock me that today as advanced as we are as a society, the primary battle yet to be won is still on the very basic level of the idea of women as equal human beings with equal worth and freedom to chart their own course in life.

The work of "gender empowerment" must not only help girls/women to heal and recover from being victimized but also "to change the paradigm of victimizing masculinity. A deeper sea change needs to happen in our collective human consciousness, and is happening, to transform the underlying root idea of male presumption to power over women. Very simply, *men need to be willing to share power with women* and all of us need to work within our spheres of influence—particularly our faith communities—to encourage a healthy more mutual masculinity than the hierarchical forms which still exist around the world.

*How do we collectively work to change the deeper thought patterns about gender that underlie the systemic violence and human rights violations against the female half of the human family.*

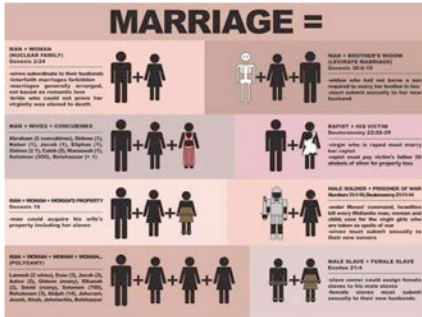
### getting faith fully onboard!

**The faith-based sector is a much needed, high impact lever of change in the global work of gender justice.** Religion exerts a powerful force on the deeper attitudes that drive our behavior and how we see our place in the world. Religion in its highest form helps elevate our social conscience and lift our ideals to see beyond the power-based social patterns of our world to glimpse a vision of another world that could be... Yet too often religion becomes "static" and reinforces unjust social conventions rather than transforming them.

Religion has been a mixed bag for women. All of the world's religious traditions grew up in highly patriarchal cultural soil and have contributed in their own particular way to perpetuating a patriarchal social structure which elevates the masculine over the feminine.

Religion like culture is not static, and all of our faith traditions face the continuing task of how to interpret an ancient text with a wide range of gender norms to today's realities. It is beyond the scope of this article to really delve into the various gender values woven through our faith traditions, but as this graphic so poignantly shows,

most we do not choose to emulate today... see larger image  
<http://lezgetreal.com/2012/08/what-is-biblical-marriage-this-infographic-explains/>



Change is hard. It doesn't happen overnight, but somehow it seems that changing gender attitudes evoke particular hostility. It is a plain fact that the most vocal and strident opposition to women's equality today comes from religious voices who claim that God is on their side. And like all social justice movements, those supporting women's full equality also claim that God is on their side. The plain and simple reality is that none of our world's holy books contains one uniform view on gender. Rather, each as we see above, contains a collage of various gender norms (including a lot of gender-based violence) which reflect how embedded gender norms are with culture.

Is not the best gift our religious traditions can offer the world a very firm, *unambiguous ideal of human equality*, a vision of a more *fully human* humanity where women and men do not aspire to live in hierarchies but rather as true partners and complements. Are hierarchies really the best we can offer the world? (None of us really likes to be on the bottom rung of any hierarchy, do we? Even if it is just a limited, circumscribed role we play at work, all things being equal, we all thrive better as human beings if we are valued and empowered as equals with some sphere of agency and power.) Is there not a higher ideal within our faith traditions?

Many people of faith are on board and are getting on board with gender equality--including "conservative" leaning Christians <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/december-web-only/waking-up-church-to-gender-injustice.html?paging=off> <http://www.cbeinternational.org/> Muslims <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/>, Jews, Buddhists, and also inter-faith efforts <http://www.learningpartnership.org/whereweare>) and yes, even men. We have our work to do to clean up our collective gender baggage and keep bending the moral arc toward justice for girls and women.

**gender empowerment:  
power over to power with**

Gender empowerment is a big part of much of the development work being done around the world. Sometimes empowerment looks like a microfinance loan or a sewing machine, giving a woman some tangible alternative to selling her body to feed her children. Other times, empowerment looks like a school full of girls learning and expanding their minds and delaying child-bearing.

Given all the violence in the world, women's empowerment programs devote a lot of energy and resources to helping girls and women heal and recover from abuse and move from being victims to survivors and finally to empowered agents of change. But it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that change needs to happen both on the individual level and the societal level.

What does it really mean to "empower" girls and women on a collective level? It comes in many programmatic forms but at the core involves a leveling of imbalanced gender power dynamics from a model of "power over" (a pecking order of) to a model of *power with*: shared power, shared agency, and shared voice... a duet of masculine and feminine which, if we peel back all of the layers of patriarchy, remains a hidden ideal in all of our hearts, to live as Adam and Eve, the archetypal humans, did in the garden in a state of mutuality and shalom with one another, with creation and with Creator rather than in a dehumanizing hierarchical way.

**shalom**



I am no Hebrew scholar, but I am pretty sure than the notion of "shalom" does not include caste systems, hierarchies of birthright, or anything slavery-like. In 2011, my foundation made a decision to be more intentional about adopting a "gender lens" in our philanthropy to do our part in restoring "shalom"—the Hebrew concept for the wholeness and well-being of all things united in Divine Love. See [http://www.imagodeifund.org/Gender-Lens\\_Granting.pdf](http://www.imagodeifund.org/Gender-Lens_Granting.pdf) if you are interested in learning more about this. We are still fleshing out how to operationalize this grand idea, but very simply "Where we see the fabric of life unraveling, whether emotionally, physically or spiritually, we see a holy invitation to partner with God in the restoration of shalom."

*God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth." God created human beings; God created them godlike, Reflecting God's nature. God created them male and female.*  
 Gen 1:26-28a The Message

"Gender shalom" requires more than women jockeying for power or even women rising up to empower themselves. Men need to be willingly to let go of and share whatever power and advantage society has given them. Without this, our gender relations will always be characterized by insecurity, violence, and polarization. Deep down, does not our faith teach us an ethic of mutual sacrifice and honoring and empowering each other's God-given agency, talents, and power to live together side-by-side as partners in creating a better world.

A fascinating book, *Sex and World Peace* <http://www.amazon.com/Sex-World-Peace-Valerie-Hudson/dp/0231131828> by M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett makes a compelling case for gender equality as the most effective driver of global shalom: "Would you believe it if I said that when a country reduces its rates of violence against girls and women it also lowers its propensity for engaging in military conflict? There are meaningful, powerful and verifiable connections between violence in the home and a nation's level of militarization and war. It turns out that the security of girls and women—how safe they are in their homes, in their schools, on their streets—is a measure of the security of the

state they live in." <http://cwgl.tumblr.com/>

"The very best predictor of a state's peacefulness is not its level of wealth, its level of democracy, or its ethno-religious identity; the best predictor of a state's peacefulness is how well its women are treated. What's more, democracies with higher levels of violence against women are as insecure and unstable as non-democracies."

### be the change, bend the arc

So, the gender terrain in our world is not exactly a picture of shalom and you don't like it, not one bit! Lets land the plane now... what can you do about it, really? It gives you angst, but the problems seem so macro and intractable, the tide of cruel misogyny so massive, that it can seem hopeless. Change happens slowly and sometimes goes backwards before going forward. Changing regressive gender norms is extra prone to backlash. But let us not lose faith in "the moral arc of the universe" that "bends toward justice" but let us not tire in doing our part to be that bend and embodying in our own thinking, asking, doing, and giving the change we want to see in our world.

#1: Gender-lens THINKING: *Ideas have consequences...* Ideas literally shape reality. They are powerful! But they are not static. Ideas are always in the process of change. Religious ideas have particular weight in our world and continue to exert a powerful influence on our collective subconscious attitudes so more so than anything are *ideas with consequences*. But as we see by all the violence, human rights violations, warfare and unjust hierarchies done in the name of religion, we know that not all religious ideas are created equally. Religious ideas easily become static and ossified and can lose their transcendent quality, but if you look within all of our religious traditions, they too are dynamic and open to change and re-interpretation and each has a current of social justice running through it. The tension between staticness and change is particularly true when it comes to women given the highly patriarchal soil within which all of our faith traditions originated.

As a person of faith who cares about gender justice, take some time to get the *big idea of human equality* on the forefront of your mind and connect all the dots between imbalanced, diminishing ideas about gender and the humanitarian consequences we see in our world. Sort through the patriarchal layers of your OWN faith tradition and mine it for its inner spiritual core that affirms the intrinsic human equality of males and females. Look for connections across faith traditions.

What the world needs, what the movement to empower girls and women and combat femicide needs, more than anything, are spiritual ambassadors who can offer the world a very clear and *unambiguous* spiritual ideal of human equality that can help lift our eyes upward to draw inspiration to question and transform long-standing practices and ideas which privilege the masculine over the feminine and undermine the gender shalom we were all created for as children of God. I have relied upon Christians for Biblical Equality (provide link) as a resource, and have recommended it to many Christian-based organizations who are working to empower women in highly patriarchal societies where many of the churches too reinforce the same patriarchal attitude. And here are some egalitarian resources for other religious traditions:

#2: Gender-lens ASKING: As a funder of many Christian NGO's and increasingly some inter-faith initiatives, I am still learning how to

use a "gender-lens" but what I find most powerful is simply asking questions: "Does your organization have any explicit beliefs or policies about gender equality?" Do you have women on your board? In your end-of-the-year giving and in any interactions you have with non-profits you are interested in investing in, I encourage you to wear your gender-lens and just be curious... ask questions which get beneath the rhetoric and PR to find out whether the organization is doing more than just offering charity to women but is working to change the underlying structures which create gender inequality and at a minimum is not reinforcing them. Just asking good questions lets organizations know that potential donors are using a gender-lens and want to be on the leading edge of bending the arc of justice for girls and women

#3: Gender-lens DOING: There are so many ways to volunteer and spread a ripple of goodwill into the world. What is yours to do in your corner of the world to create a more gender-balanced world? I am not going to be presumptuous to know that answer to this question!

But I will suggest one idea if you are interested in learning more about gender-lens social change. From what I have seen in my gender-lens donor activism women's funds that exist in most cities have a very developed, cutting-edge "theory of change" which is women-led and very focused around tangible impact. I joined the allocations committee of the Boston Women's Fund last year which is responsible for reviewing all of their proposals and learned so much about how to promote and be apart of gender-lens social change.

I have lived in Boston for over 12 years and I have to say never really knew much about the struggles and amazing leadership and activism of women in immigrant and ethnic neighborhoods here. You don't have to go to Cambodia or Turkey, two places I have been to, to see that the struggles of women to overcome patriarchal attitudes and practices are the same everywhere. So, if you are so inclined, do some research and consider getting involved in a local women's fund.

#4: Gender-lens INVESTING: There are numerous ways to give/invest with a combined faith/gender-lens. Look for **inspired movements** to invest in rather than just single organizations (although I will highlight some below). Whether through traditional giving/philanthropy or what is now called "impact investing" (investing for social and financial return) keep your gender-lens engaged whatever the particular programmatic area. Whether health, economic development, environment, community development, gender cuts through everything.

Through my faith and gender lenses, inspired movements worthy of investment which *bending the moral arc* toward justice for girls and women, addressing both the roots and the branches of gender injustice include:

- **anti-trafficking:** This is truly a global movement bringing all sorts of unlikely sectors together as modern-day abolitionists. Many of the evangelical organizations tend to look at the problem more as a child protection issue than a gender issue, but the whole field is transitioning to another phase in its growth where some of the linkages with other gender human rights issues, like prostitution, are being acknowledged. So many great organizations to choose from, but one I will highlight here which uses a gender-lens and is dealing with changing underlying attitudes of exploitative views of

sexuality is the Coalition Against the Trafficking of Women <http://www.catwinternational.org/> which works domestically and abroad and has some great programs which are educating boys to develop a healthy masculinity.

- **combatting child marriage:** This is a newer global movement than anti-trafficking, but at it's core it is combatting the same thing: the sale and barter of girls lives and bodies. Often there are laws in place against child marriage, but they are superseded by "tradition". Girls Not Brides is a new global partnership that is bringing traditional male leaders on board, grassroots efforts, and the pressure of the international community to eradicate this practice. There are many promising examples of regions which have virtually eradicated child marriage in a relatively short period of time. <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/>
- **women of faith as peace-builders:** Another growing inspired movement that I see creating gender-lens impact is women of faith rising up to build bridges of peace across religious and ethnic dividing lines. Two which my foundation has had the privilege of partnering with is the Women of Faith for Peace and Security within the Institute for Global Engagement: (<http://www.globalengage.org/pressroom/releases/1259-ige-launches-new-initiative-women-of-faith-for-peace-and-security.html>) and the Institute for Women, Religion & Globalization at Union Theological Seminary (<http://www.utsnyc.edu/institutes-initiatives/women-religion-globalization>)
- **demand abolition/healthy masculinity:** The furthest "upstream" you can go, is right to the source of patriarchy: the demand for a victimizing, exploitative form of sexuality where girls and women are seen as subhuman. Leading the way is an amazing effort called Demand Abolition, which is bringing together a diverse cross-section of society, lawyers, politicians, donors, activists, law enforcement, with the daring idea that we can actually stem the demand for prostitution and other exploitative practices: <http://www.demandabolition.org/>
- **egalitarian reinterpreting of scriptures:** As we've discussed throughout this article, in a world where religious fundamentalism is on the rise, helping religious institutions to work through literalistic interpretations of their holy books is essential to this work of gender balancing our world. Given that my work has been mostly with Christian ngos, the two organizations I would recommend investing in are Christians for Biblical Equality <http://www.cbeinternational.org/> and World Vision's Channels of Hope for Gender <http://strongwomenstrongworld.org/coh/> both of which are working around the world to help Christians develop a Biblical view of gender equality and integrate this into their humanitarian programs. Sojourners magazine is doing a new campaign around gender justice so keep your eyes open for this too: <http://sojo.net/>
- **micro-finance:** The economic dimension of our gender imbalanced world can not be over-emphasized. There are many organizations out there working to empower women by giving them loans to start their own businesses and earn a decent livelihood. Many large ngos do micro-finance but one that zeros in on this is Opportunity International, <http://www.opportunity.org/>, a Christian-inspired organization with the motto "Invest in One Woman. Empower many."
- **gender-lens impact investing:** This is a hot new space with some

amazingly inspired women leading the way. The basic idea is to mobilize more capital to gender-balance our world beyond just traditional giving. There are networks you can join to align your values with your investing and some great advisors out there. To learn more, check out this article by Jackie Vanderbrug, a pioneer in this space who has brought me into this movement:

[http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/mainstreaming\\_gender\\_lens\\_investing](http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/mainstreaming_gender_lens_investing)

- **women-led philanthropy:** Lastly, I will highlight that an amazing movement which is truly a force of nature, one which I have been privileged to be a part of, which is "mobilizing unprecedented resources" toward girls and women around the world. Women tend to be more collaborative than men in their giving and know that we are stronger together than working in isolation. Real lasting global gender balance cannot happen without more of us giving *bigger and bolder* to invest in gender-lens social change. If you want to get a glimpse into the heart and soul of this movement, check out this inspiring Ted Talk by the CEO of Women Moving Millions <http://www.womenmovingmillions.org/what-we-are/why-women-girls/>, Jackie Zehner, who describes our world right now at an exciting a precipice of change for gender equality: <http://tedxwomen.org/speakers/jacki-zehner/>

So many great faith-based organizations out there which are a part of this larger movement of gender-balancing our world. If you are already committed to certain organizations but want to use more of a gender-lens this year, consider targeting your donation within any organization to girls/women's programming. For example, World Relief <http://worldrelief.org/stand-for-women> and World Vision <http://strongwomenstrongworld.org/> are both fabulous global NGOs and both have girls/women/s programming which covers the whole gamut of community development with girls and women at the center. If you are interested in a particular region, there are lots of small inspiring yet harder-to-find women-led NGOs out there that are fun to give to. One way to get money to hard-to-reach small organizations led by inspiring women activists in highly patriarchal places around the world is to give to a global fund like the Global Fund for Women <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/> which has regional networks all over the world providing technical assistance and grants to grassroots women change agents.

Whatever you are inspired to do this holiday season, keep the wellbeing of girls/women around the world on the forefront of your mind, keep your eyes wide open, listen to your heart know what is yours to do to keep bending the arc, bit by bit, to create a more just, gender-balanced world for the girl child to grow and thrive and flourish to her full potential. Trust that human equality is intrinsically true and attractive. Another world is indeed on her way...

*Shalom*

