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St. Scholastica's Priory  
Manila

Dear Sisters,

This month, we will finally celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of our congregation which we launched last year. Our gratitude goes to God for all the graces our congregation has received all through these years. God saw us through the early crisis that rocked our congregation in its cradle. God saw us through the many new beginnings we had to do in our first mission field East Africa, when our pioneer Sisters poured out their blood to water our fledgling institution. When we visited their graves in Tanzania, we saw that they died before they were even thirty years of age either killed by rebels or by the plague. And now we have grown from one end of the world to the other.

On this 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our birth, God has chosen to give us a gift in the Manila Priory that of opening a new mission of healing ministry in Catarman. Our Generalate has given us the go-signal. And unexpected blessings come our way like meeting Mr. Noynoy Tan whose family is going to give us a 3 hectares of land to build our hospital. The bishop has been calling on families in Catarman to help us. I met a doctor who started a community hospital in Cadiz and who is willing to share his expertise and experience with us. But we realize the difficulties that will come along the way and so I ask earnestly for your prayers and sacrifices for this intention.

Nevertheless my conviction has been strengthened that if we have a dream and it is worthwhile fulfilling, all the forces of the universe even the cosmic forces will align themselves to make our dream come true. We live in faith and hope.

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

# 125TH JUBILEE STATIO CONFERENCE

## STABILITY

By: Iberian Priory

Our Statio - series on Missionary Benedictine vows and values draw to a close with a meditation on “stability”. Thus we bring “stability” to light, raising it from the shadows it gained in modern spirituality and enhance its values. It is not easy to explain it as it is suspected of being old-fashioned, of nailing down a person to immobility, turning somebody ‘uniform’ and boring.

In a short basic meditation we envision some simple images: the wrinkled face of an old person...; a weather-beaten tree ...; an old castle ...; a rock in breaking waves ... In all these pictures sparkle facets of “stability”, which, maybe, awaken in us a desire of being like or getting to know such persons, people who give us security, in whom we can confide, who radiate conviction and equilibrium. Such are the personalities St. Benedict wanted for his communities!

The following suggestions do not intend to nor can they substitute the study of the sources, the *lectio* of Sacred Scripture, of the Rule of Saint Benedict, of our Constitutions; however, they want to invite to further thinking and meditation.

Stability~ a form of life freely chosen

“Stability” evolves – ‘comes to be’, it is not just simply there for us to pick! I choose it as the ‘way of my life’. For this purpose, St. Benedict established his “*School for the Service of the Lord*” (RB Prol. 45), the “*workshop*” of the monastery (RB 4:78), where stability will be practiced through a free perseverance in the same place under all circumstances (for me: in the Congregation and in her Mission), through personal asceticism with a firm goal before the eyes, through fidelity to the community (to which I belong at the moment). In living stability we construct the “*House of the Lord*” (RB 53:22; 64:5) “*founded on rock*” (RB Prol.33 ff; Mt.7:24) and “*wisely administered*” (cf. RB 53:22). To live in this house means to follow the “*way of life*” and, thus indirectly proclaiming it.

*Is this form of life for me a “burden” or a “joy”?*

## Stability – a Benedictine and fundamental vow

“Stability” is not an interchangeable way of life, but a *permanent* one, through a promise reflected on and freely offered to God’s glory, for the edification of the Church and for the salvation of the world. Stability was so important for St. Benedict that a postulant, during the probation time, had to promise it twice, and in the rite of profession (see RB 58) it occupied the first place. For it is through the “God-seekers” perseverant staying together in community and in the same place, that Benedict created the *space* in which all the other vows can obtain a personal and concrete form, can “incarnate” (for example: in mutual obedience and in obedience to the Abbot).

*Have I ever meditated my obedience, my daily conversion, my poverty and my celibacy with this prism in mind? What does this way of meditating “stability” mean for me personally?*

## Stability – a multi-faceted virtue

St. Benedict did not invent “stability.” Already in pre-Christian antiquity, a desirable goal was: to rest in oneself, gain joyful serenity, the *tranquilitas*. The Sacred Scriptures praise the *homo stabilis*, the person who is self-controlled, faithful and persevering, firm in faith (e.g. 1 Kings 2:45; Mk 12:14; 1 Co 15:58. 16:13; 2 Co 1:24; 1 Pt 5:9, etc.) For the desert monks the *stabilitas* was a proven way to fight for sanctity and “white martyrdom”; the first monastic communities raised stability to a criterion of an authentic monastic vocation; the Fathers of the Church describe it with diverse concepts, according to the aspect that they wish to accentuate: *perseverantia* = persistency; perseverance; *stabilitas* = firmness, perseverance, constancy; *firmitas* = resoluteness, steadfastness; as verb *persistere* = persevering; *permanere* = remaining, persevering, persisting. St. Benedict preferred the version of *stabilitas*, a word taken from the military language of that time: a soldier had to be courageous in battle and persist (stand) with firmness in his position, defending himself against all attacks. It shows that St. Benedict wants people who “stay” in their place, know for whom they undertake “military service”, battle and persevere until death!

*Under what aspect do I see my own perseverance?*

## Stability – an ordinary way for self-knowledge

“Stability” does not mean an extraordinary life. Thomas Merton explains in his book, *The Sign of Jonas*: “By making the vow of stability the monk renounces the vain hope of wandering off to find a ‘perfect monastery’. This implies a deep act of faith: the recognition that it does not much matter where we are or whom we live with ... Stability becomes difficult for a man whose monastic ideal contains some note, some element of the extraordinary. All monasteries are more

or less ordinary ... Its ordinariness is one of its greatest blessings.” “My cell”, my community, my personal space in which I “seek God”, becomes for me a place of self-knowledge. I learn what is in me, what determines me, what becomes an inducement for me, a temptation from which I desire to flee. It can be such simple things as food, sleep, daydreams, companionship, conversation, TV, the computer, the mobile phone, internet ...

*How do I deal with my temptations against stability: with impulses of being a “workaholic”, with the desire to run away, the fear of tediousness / boredom, the avoidance of ‘the ordinary’, the temptation of an ‘escapade’, the desire of novelties and news, with sympathies and antipathies, with the sadness of acedia?*

*Have I had similar experiences? How do I deal with them?*

Stability – dynamic fidelity as a response to the “signs of the times”

Persevering in the same place and with the same persons does not produce any static or dead end. Rather it liberates creative forces that can ‘design’ new “evangelical” communities. All directives of the Rule show how St. Benedict perceived such a new community as living the “*Good News* (RB 72); that it becomes like the leaven that penetrates society through its life, bringing salvation, harmony and hope to a torn world. Was that a possible “alternative” only in the time of St. Benedict? Would not also today a community of people who support each other, who believe together, who have a common mission and persevere in it offer a life worth living, even as desired for the problems of our time? This in the midst of the decline of social structures, of the expulsion of millions of people, of enslavement and trafficking of women and children, of armed conflicts and destructions, of taking side against each other and deviation in the ‘seeking of God’, even inside the Church through fleeing from compromise (gyrovagues) and the idolatry of one’s own will (sarabaites)?

*Do I recognize with joy in this contemporary panorama our / my own “mission” (missio dei!) and how important it is to pursue it in stability – against the “spirit of the times”? Do I rejoice in my creative forces? What use do I make of them?*

Stability – a spiritual attitude

“Stability” is more than exteriorly to tie down a person in a determined place, to a particular community (Congregation). It means perseverance in “seeking God”, *stabilitas cordis* – (Const. II, N 206), endurance and letting oneself be “formed”, which can only happen in *this* place and in *this* community because my personal vocation has “put” me there. After all, it is in this place, in this community and its mission that I “make my home” in Christ (cf. Jo 15,1-7). “Remaining” in Jesus, the “true vine”, invigorates stability. It results in right RELATIONSHIP in the love of Christ and in mutual love, in personal PURIFICATION, in accepting oneself and

“fraternal correction”, through dwelling together and “in” each other. Thus grows FRUIT: friendship with God, orientation, peace, orderly relations.

*What value does God’s friendship have for me? – What would I give for it?*

Stability – an image of Divine Life

Is God persevering? The Trinitarian Mystery is praise without equal of “stability”, of the fidelity of an eternal and loving surrender (cf.: Theology of the Evangelical Counsels, in *Vita Consecrata*, n° 17 ff.). Jesus found the “space” of his *stabilitas* in his persistent “resting in the Father’s heart”, in his solitary hours of nightly prayer in the mountains; He showed this stability in the unflinching fidelity to His disciples, even in treason and in death; in his “my food is to do the will of the Father”; in His “dwelling” in the Eucharist!

*In prayer, do I immerse myself in the mystery of God’s perseverance?*

## **Coping with the Genuinely Difficult Religious**

By: Jeffrey Mickler

I “googled” the term “difficult people” and instantly two hundred million sites were found. Business managers, owners, and employees are all seeking answers on how to cope with people who are genuinely difficult to get along with. The hilarious 1980 movie *Nine to Five* told of the revenge three female employees took against their male chauvinist boss. In real life, however, revenge is never a solution, and dealing with difficult people is never really funny. Hence, there are books like Sandra A. Crowe’s *Since Strangling Isn’t an Option*. Difficult people drain others’ enthusiasm and suck the life out of organizations, as the title *Working with You is Killing Me* by Katherine Crowley and Kathi Elster suggests.

Dealing with difficult people in the workplace is one thing. Living with them in a religious community raises the bar. Although all of us can be difficult at times, some religious are chronically difficult and even hostile. Augustine Poulain SJ in his 19th-century spiritual classic *The Interior Graces* describes one type of difficult religious:

Another trial...is living with an irritable person who finds fault with everything, never speaks a pleasant word.... These difficult characters often have the reputation of being very amiable abroad because they are full of attention for those whom they need, or those who would not allow themselves to be bullied.

These nervous natures may be likened to torpedoes on account of the charges

that they let fly at those who approach them. It is impossible to arrange any matter with them clearly and quietly. Above all, let no one try to excuse himself when they accuse him of anything or [try to] prove to them that they are mistaken.... The volcano will then be in full eruption, Such minds will never be in the wrong; they alone are endowed with sound judgment.

This behaviour shows...a grave lack of charity. In community, characters of this nature make life very difficult for others, and are sometimes the cause of abandonment of vocations.

Father Stephen Rossetti, of St. Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland, in his recorded conference *Spirituality of Christian Leadership*, describes such people as suffering “chronically impaired social functioning.” These individuals have “inflexible, maladaptive ways of dealing with other people.” Wherever they are stationed, they divide and disrupt communities. Their natural charm ensures that they will have some supporters, but their anger at the world for not revolving around their needs makes them almost impossible to live with. When confronted by authority with long list of complaints, these people blame others and are unable to grasp that they themselves have caused any problems. Father Rossetti points out that they have narcissistic personalities. When confronted, they erupt into a rage that sends shock waves through a community. Some of them end up living in their own apartments because provincials can find no communities willing to tolerate their divisive behavior.

Rossetti says the chances of changing them for the better are extremely slim. Traditional therapies have proven fruitless. He advises giving such persons honest feedback, together with strict and clear guidelines for their behaviour. Leader must be compassionate towards them, but firm. The leadership has a responsibility to do all in its power to prevent them from terrorizing the community and running roughshod over people.

Rossetti’s position that modern therapy can do little to change such characters corresponds to Poulain’s 19th-century assessment: “I have seen very religious persons try to cure themselves of this irritability. They have been unable to succeed....I think a miracle is required to overcome these temperaments.”

Sean Sammon of the Marist Brothers has done extensive research on dealing with difficult people. Drawing upon the works of Robert M. Bramson, Charles J. Keating, and Robert L. Veninga and James P. Spradley, he has developed a pragmatic and effective approach that is presented on tapes from St. Pauls/Alba House, *Coping with the Genuinely Difficult Person*. Like Poulain and Rossetti, Sammon acknowledges that efforts to change truly difficult people are basically fruitless. He suggests, however, ways we ourselves can change in order to better cope with them. He lists seven types of difficult people. He calls all of the first three types *hostile-aggressive*: they are “Sherman tanks,” “snipers,” and “exploders.” The Sherman tanks are convinced of their ideas and dominate meetings by discounting out of hand the suggestions of

others. They present their own ideas as the only rational, workable thing for the community or committee to adopt. They refer to other approaches as “stupid,” a “waste of time,” or “ridiculous.” Sammon suggests meeting the Sherman tanks with calm strength.

When the Sherman tanks begin to roll over a meeting, the chair should let them go on for a while but then abruptly intervene: “Stop right there; we have heard your objections; now we need valuable input from others.” Sherman tanks will most likely add a few new objections until the chair or the presenter interrupts: “We will be covering those objections and discussing them as the meeting goes on!” Participants, presenters, and leaders need to stand up for themselves against the Sherman tanks, clearly explaining their positions, not backing down but avoiding a fight. Hostile-aggressive individuals almost always “win” in a fight, but the Sherman tanks usually respect such strength. They often do have valid insights that the community can benefit from; it is their ways of behaving that make it hard for the community to consider their input fairly.

“**Snipers**” will make remarks that are just barely audible to the person being targeted. The remarks are biting and sarcastic, and the victim is supposed to laugh them off. These are different from good-natured kidding. To ignore or laugh off sniper remarks encourages maladaptive behaviour. Sammon advises standing up to snipers by asking them what was really meant by the remark. They will then either back off or explain exactly what they meant. If they explain the remark, it should be evaluated in a nondefensive manner.

“**Exploders**” burst into a rage when frustrated and psychologically threatened. Often the group or its leader is taken by surprise and cannot figure out exactly what triggered the explosion. These rages, according to Brother Sammon, are “adult temper tantrums.” He also likens them to a “seizure.” He says people should let the tantrum go until it wanes and then intervene with a statement that reassures the exploder and helps him or her save face. Words like these could be used: “I can see you are upset and concerned about this matter, and I am as upset as you. It is important that we get to the bottom of the situation.” If it is a group meeting, the leader might propose that they take a five-minute break and then continue.

If an intervention is not made in a timely respectful way, exploders are likely to make sweeping statements like “You people don’t know what you are doing! I’m the only one that cares about this situation! I am tired of putting up with this nonsense!” They might then storm out of the room leaving the gathering numb, frustrated, and angry. Sammon believes that they elicit a more violent and hostile reaction from the community than other difficult types. He urges individuals to cope with hostile-aggressive persons on an equal plane in any situation. Snipers, exploders, and Sherman tanks might do their worst damage in the kitchen, refectory, or TV room.

A frustrating situation for a community that Sammon does not cover arises when hostile-aggressive persons act out in maladaptive ways during times of prayer. Perhaps the worst acting out takes place in the celebration of the Eucharist. A religious priest who is a Sherman tank might use the homily to impose his ideas on the community. About that homily, snipers who are concelebrating might make a snide remark just loud enough for the concelebrants and perhaps the first row in the chapel to hear. One time, as concelebrants were processing out of the cathedral after the installation of a bishop, I heard a priest remark, "If his homily is an indication of the quality of his leadership, we are in real trouble." The words were loud enough for a number of priests to hear, and a few of the laity along the aisle as well. The situation made the remark particularly inappropriate. My thought was "May God have mercy on the soul of the poor bishop!" Exploders might shout from the altar if parents do not remove a crying child immediately. These ways of acting are particularly difficult to cope with because there is no way to address the behaviour during the liturgy.

All of these behaviours, according to Brother Sammon, need a firm, quick, and composed response. The community needs to get along with the task at hand and to carry out its mission. Sammon insists that the difficult behaviour of hostile-aggressive persons is just one aspect of their lives. They are making definite contributions and have a great deal to offer the community. Their maladaptive behaviour, however, checkmates and undermines their positive contributions. He rightly points out that they cannot grasp that their dramatic gestures and behaviour alienate their peers. In coping with difficult persons from a position of calm strength, communities enable themselves to make positive use of their talent while preventing the terrorism. Sammon stresses maintaining a friendly demeanour with them no matter how often they try to roll over the group, take shots at individuals, or blow people away with their rage.

### **Chronic Complainers**

Sammon points out those complainers seldom have anything good to say about leadership, the community, or its mission. They tend to wear people down and sap the community's dynamism. They feel powerless and blame their own unhappiness on others. They whine, "No one makes a decision, leadership is horrible," and other such remarks. They drain people's energy and do not feel personal responsibility for anything. They are not problem solvers. They tend to speak in absolutes: "You never answer the phone" or "Pat is always late." Sammon suggests coping with such people by listening attentively to them. Our tendency is not to listen. Listening provides an opportunity for complainers to let off steam and lessens their feelings of powerlessness. By listening we can break down the complainers' sense of isolation. Moreover, by listening to them carefully, we might gain useful and important information.

We must, however, interrupt at key moments. We must keep things specific rather than general: "Exactly when and where did someone fail to respond to you?" "What were the circumstances that led to someone being late?" "What exactly can we do to improve the

situation?” It is important to show chronic complainers that they are powerful and can make a difference in the way a community is run. In dealing with them specific problem-solving situations have to be presented and pointed questions asked. This takes work and staying with the problem-solving situation. Sammon suggests that complainers be given specific limited tasks to perform, such as writing up specific complaints as they occur over a specified time so that the person in charge can address them positively.

Sammon warns against simply listening to chronic complainers’ attacks on others. They should be told to direct their remarks directly to the persons involved. But an offer of mediation might sometimes be made, with all parties present.

### **Negativists**

Similar to chronic complainers (and sometimes the same person) are what Sammon calls “negativists.” They are the classic wet blankets: “Nothing can be done.” “Don’t waste your time.” “We tried it last year.” “We don’t have the right personnel.” Negativists can affect a whole group. Like chronic complainers, negativists feel they have little power over their own lives. They may have been unable to work through early disappointment in their lives. To cope with them, Sammon urges the following: (1) Avoid getting drawn in to their viewpoint. (2) State your own optimism, for example, “I think we have adequate resources.” (3) Do not argue. (4) Do not rush in with answers to their objections, because they will have objections to them too. (5) Ask them, “What is the worst that can happen to us?” (6) Listen positively, expecting to hear some valid points. (7) Be prepared to go it alone. After hearing all the negative objections, respond with something like “I really feel that we have enough to get this project going. Who is with me?”

### **Silent and Unresponsive Religious**

Some people are just quiet; when they have something to say, they will say it. Silent and unresponsive persons, however, are different. They simply refuse to give the community or superiors truly important feedback. They are generally motivated by either fear or anger. When asked about a situation that they are involved in, they might be afraid to look ridiculous or incompetent and therefore choose to say nothing; silence is their way of evading an uncomfortable situation. It may, however, be an expression of calculated aggression and anger. The main task in coping with silent and unresponsive persons is to get them to open up. Ask questions that cannot be answered yes or no.

Presenters or superiors should be prepared for long periods of silence, using a friendly or engaging stare. Stay relaxed. Do not tell them what you think they are feeling or make guesses about why they refuse to answer. You may, however, comment on the situation from your own perspective and say, “We seem to have a difficulty here, and it *seems* from my perspective that you are unable to answer my question” or “You *seem* stressed, uncomfortable with my question.” Or perhaps you may ask: “Is there anything I can help you with to get more clarification on

this?” You do not want to appear as a grand inquisitor, but rather as a fellow religious in need of knowing what the silent and unresponsive persons are going through. You are not seeking to win an argument with them or to place blame on them, but simply to get them to open up. If they say nothing except “Can I go now?” you may say, “The answer to the question I posed to you is important to me, and we are not finished.” You should say this in a gentle but firm tone. If they remain silent, superiors can outline a course of action that will be taken to address the question posed. At that point the unresponsive persons might respond very negatively, but this response is the opening up that was hoped for.

### **Super-agreeables**

Some religious need to be liked and loved by everyone. They always say yes and try to please others. They may ultimately alienate people, however, because they make more promises than they can fulfil; they may fail to finish any project. To cope with these people, Brother Sammon emphasizes making honesty nonthreatening. Make it clear that it is O.K. to disagree and to say no. Do not let them make impossible commitments. Help them learn to place limits on themselves. The way to know what the superagreeables are really feeling and believing is to listen closely to their humour and jokes. It is often the only way that they are comfortable in expressing negative feelings and attitudes.

### **Beyond Coping**

Hostile-aggressive and passive-aggressive religious can be compared to specks of sand that lodge in oyster shells. The shells’ lining envelops the specks of sand and eventually turns them into pearls. Saints have warned that community life is a difficult cross to bear. We bear it because it teaches the hard lesson of loving those who seem to have no love or respect for us. I think of Therese of Lisieux. Upon her death one of the nuns, perhaps a chronic sniper, remarked, “What is Mother Superior going to say at the funeral? Therese never did anything.” The only thing she did was love chronic complainers, snipers, exploders, Sherman tanks, and other genuinely difficult people that were a part of her community. In the process she herself became a respected community guide, one of the most beloved saints, patroness of missionaries and a doctor of the church. Beyond coping with the difficult people, we must learn to love them. Then those who find us genuinely difficult to live with will perhaps-in spite of everything-love us as well.

# EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

BY: PROF. RITA NORONHA

EXCERPTS (continued)

## III The Forces behind Gender Inequality

### 1. Complexity of Interrelated Causes sustains gender inequality

#### **A Note on the family Institution**

The family was termed by Christopher Lasch (1977) “a Haven in a Heartless World”. No doubt, those of us who were lucky enough to have a loving mother and father or at least one of them and loving siblings have experienced the truth of this statement. However, behind this picture of secure, loving families, there are certain harsh truths, which are often hidden or glossed over. It is important to consider some of these in more detail.

Patriarchal families reflect a patriarchal macro-society: the gender, age differentiation in the wider society or sub-culture gets reflected in the family which is a micro unit of the macro society. Where there is patriarchal or male leadership in society or sub-culture, families also mirror male leadership and female subordination, adult domination and child subordination. Such families are not woman-friendly or child-friendly. Different forms of gender and age discrimination, overt and covert, informal and systemic, more or less authoritarian, and more or less abusive, are manifested by patriarchal families both traditional and contemporary.

As women are taught to be docile and obedient in many patriarchal families, they bear abusive treatment in silence, the husband being considered (God). According to the traditional custom, it is the wife’s duty to obey the husband and remain faithful to him at any cost. Moreover, women are conditioned to justify the abuse of their bodies. Many men as well as women in contemporary families carry such patriarchal baggage.

Women are taught to negate self-care in patriarchal families. Such families thrive on exploiting the productive, life-giving, nurturing and healing energies of women, who are conditioned to labor tirelessly for others as careers, bearers, healers and sex-gratifiers, and to negate “self”. They are daughters, sisters, mothers, in-laws but not ‘human persons’ in their own right. The self-identity or personhood of the woman/girl and her need for ‘self-care is totally undermined. The question is how can women who are conditioned to care for, love and respect themselves and have no time or space for themselves, respect, love and care for others in a manner that upholds the dignity of both herself and the others? How can she affirm herself, her selfhood and assert her equality with men and expect from men and her children respect and caring behavior?

Family disharmony reflects societal disharmony. There are reasons for the increase in divorce and separation in contemporary society. Continued patriarchal dominance is resisted by more critically conscious and educated girls. The stress and strain of a highly competitive hierarchical economy and work atmosphere, the widening wealth differential and the resultant hunger, poverty, exclusion and

marginalization and criminalization of society, and the menace of fundamentalism and communalism are factors that destroy human relationships and vitiate social harmony including that of the family.

## **2. Inadequacy of Theoretical Perspectives on Gender Sensitization and Empowerment of Women**

The lack of sound theoretical perspectives on the issues of gender sensitization and the empowerment of women is another major reason responsible for the tardy progress towards the goal of the empowerment of women. There is a lack of conceptual clarity on terms such as sex and gender, and the distinction between the two. As a result, those who are required to facilitate the process of gender sensitization contribute to reinforce the gender stereotypes. It is important to understand that the process of gender sensitization is an effective means to alter the subordinate situation of women.

Gender sensitization involves the critical questioning of the deeply ingrained patriarchal views, myths and attitudes regarding the male and female body. There is evidence to show that the female body is in no way inferior to the male. The female body has biological and genetic strengths which the male does not possess and vice versa. The relative strengths (biological or genetic) that women and men possess should in no way result in the domination of one over the other. In this context R. Estella's statement appears to be of significance – "Women's chains have been forged by men, not by anatomy".

Gender sensitization involves questioning the gender/role stereotypes that are associated with men and women. All those perspectives that downgrade women or deify certain roles (i.e., mother) and uphold men or valorize certain roles have to be called into question. Both are human persons first and share all the strengths and frailties of human nature Arishad Vuiris.

Gender sensitization is praxis-centered. There is often an attempt at associating the gender sensitization process with classroom-centered teaching. Gender sensitization like critical consciousness raising (Paulo Freire) involves study, analysis, planning, action and reflection. It is a process wherein the excluded women come together and engage collectively to study and analyse gender discrimination and to resist the same through planned action. Gender sensitization is both a personal as well as a collective process. It is a sustained process of solidarity building among women and men towards the goal of gender equality.

Gender sensitization is a process of altering the gendered self: male and female are both conceived from the fecundation of seeds from the mother and the father ( $x+x = \text{female}$ ;  $x+y = \text{male}$ ) both have genes passed on from the paternal and maternal sides over millions of years of human evolution. So as human beings created in the image of God, they have more commonalities than differences. Gender sensitization involves educating the self to become a humane self- a self that moves beyond gender, following the example of Jesus, our Saviour. It seeks the development of an integrated, wholesome self where male and female exist in harmony.

The lack of clarity regarding the concept, means and ends of the empowerment of women hinders the process. The word "empowerment" comes from the Latin prefix en- meaning 'cause to be' or 'make'. In

its etymological sense the word ‘empowerment’ means to invest with power (enable someone to do something). The concept has been evolved to incorporate the following integrated elements:

- **Altering self – ‘Power Within’:** This includes deepening the critique of the internalized patriarchal self (thinking, feeling and acting behavior). It is bringing out the innate potential that lies within subjugated women and men to resist discrimination and disciplining of self. It means developing the ability to make choices, even to say ‘No’ whenever or wherever a woman wants to. It is developing the potential that lies within for holistic growth – physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. It is a process of integrating ‘self care’ with the ‘care of others’. It is the realization by the woman of the integrity of her ‘body’ and her sexuality not to be used as a commodity or object by others.
- **Enhancing Life Skills – ‘Power To’:** This involves the development of abilities by the woman to change her environment, acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes she requires to alter her external milieu. It is to develop the ability to intervene and support those women and men who suffer from discrimination, especially marginalized people. It is developing life skills such as: good governance, decision making, creative problem solving, communication, human relations and management.
- **Building Solidarity – ‘Power With’:** This applies to the process of developing solidarity among women and like-minded men. It is a process of sustained federating and networking, beginning with the grassroots and expanding from the local to the global level. It is the process of joining in the struggle of other marginalized, excluded and discriminated people so as to influence the social institutions to build structures in their favor.
- **Overcoming domination, discrimination/marginalization – ‘Power Over’:** Empowerment involves the process of enhancing the control women have over the material and knowledge resources and opportunities so as to govern their own destiny. It does not mean women accessing ‘power over man’. The empowerment of women is a process of changing those relations of power that are based on domination – ‘power over’ others. It is a process of resisting domination/exploitation and the disciplining of the body (mind and soul)

The empowerment of women is a process that involves the development of the ‘power within’, ‘power to’ and ‘power with’ aimed at altering the systems that are responsible for ‘power over’ other human beings –women and men. The empowerment of women is basically a process which involves multiple strategies/programs. It is similar to the process of gender sensitization. The end result of empowerment is gender equality –equality between women and men, between men and women by themselves. It means putting an end to all forms of discrimination, based on sex, class, caste, majority or minority as well as the end of the exclusion and the marginalization of others by systemic forces, from the local to the global. One of the aims of the process is to model and build gender-just social identities, women and men who acknowledge their own dignity and equality and that of others as beings created in the image of the Divine. Another aim is to promote a culture of gender-justice. Yet another aim is to promote structures of gender-justice – in other words, to build relations of mutuality, reciprocity and partnership between women and men, between men and between women among themselves in all sites of society such as family, work and related enterprises, schools, colleges and universities and sites of religiosity and media. The empowerment of women is not against men, it does not aim at replacing patriarchy by matriarchy (both are faces of the same coin namely hierarchy). It aims at the humanization of people, relational milieu, institutions and society in general. As G. Mongella (the Secretary General,

Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, Sept. 15, 1995) put it: “ It is no longer a question of fighting for equality with women, but for a new vision of the world which involves both men and women. This is not a struggle for women alone but for humanity.”

### **3. Inappropriate Strategies to Facilitate the Empowerment of Women (State and Civil Society)**

The civil society organizations working on specific issues of concern to women such as violence to women, sex selective abortion, health, education, media, representation in governance, micro-finance and grass-root mobilization, organization and advocacy, have made significant contributions to women’s cause in some locations more than others. However, many such efforts remain divided and isolated. There is also the criticism that the large number of civic society organizations and NGO’s have raised the level of dependency or reduced the potential for agency among women. The effectiveness of strategies and programs depends on the quality of women’s involvement in decisions and actions that aim at changing their lives, the extent to which these enhance the individual and joint control of women over resources – land, credit, housing and markets and provide women with an equitable share in positions of leadership in all institutions of society-economic, political, educational, religious and media.

### **4. Dividing and Ruling Women: Fundamentalist Revival and Communalization of Space and Identities**

The process of the West-led globalization and the consequent widening of inequalities and violence, the spread of corruption and loss of livelihood, hunger, poverty, violence and destruction of nature, have fundamentalism and communalism as corollaries. The erosion of community bonds and the consequent intensification of insecurity that are occurring side by side with unprecedented prosperity as contributing to religious revivalism/fundamentalism and its other face, communalism. Both fundamentalism and communalism are by nature patriarchal and erode the rights and liberties of women. Women are pushed back into their traditional roles, blocking their chances of assuming non-conventional roles/positions. Both trends provoke further acts of violence towards women by their own class/religious group, and atrocities against those who are considered as enemies. Both fundamentalism and communalism attempt to divide and rule. Not only men but also women are organized on religion-communal lines and incited to perform peripheral activities and rituals and to militate against women and men of other communities perceived as enemies. In fundamentalism and communalism women become perpetrators of acts of violence against others and themselves.