

“Power and Control of Women in Patriarchal Society” & “Women Created in God’s Image as Equal to Men” Wheels

As part of the development of the *Focus Guide for Clergy and Religious Leaders* developed by the Family Violence Council and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department in 1996, it was suggested to adapt the Power/Control and Equality Wheels to include Christian scriptural references for the use of congregations. The Christian wheels which follow are entitled, “Power and Control of Women in Patriarchal Society” & “Women Created in God’s Image as Equal to Men.”

The underlying assumption in creating the two wheels is that there are parts of the Christian Bible and of subsequent Christian history that have been more, or less, helpful to women.

It is hoped that clergy and religious leaders from other faith traditions might be able to look carefully and critically at their own texts and historical quotations and to develop wheels which will have meaning for those of their tradition.

Reflection on the Wheels

The process of reviewing biblical texts and historical quotations was a consuming one. The task was made easier by the use of the book, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* by Leonard Sidler, copyright 1979 by the Westminster Press.

The final product emerged as somewhat different than expected. Most biblical texts referring to women, directly or indirectly, are to be found on the wheel, “Women Created in God’s Images as Equal to Men.” There are specifically 73 total positive, as compared to 26 total negative texts listed (there are, in addition, many ambivalent texts that were not included on either wheel). It is striking that, of the 73 positive texts, 50 are to be found in the Gospels and in Acts (penned by the same evangelist as the book of Luke). In other words, 68% of the positive texts about women are to be found in the words and actions of Jesus, and in Jesus’ immediate legacy to the early Christian Church. By contrast, no references from the Gospels or the Book of Acts are found on the wheel entitled, “Power and Control of Women in patriarchal Society” – instead, historical quotations of several of the influential Church fathers are easily placed on the outer ring, which corresponds to the “physical and sexual violence” outer ring on the original “power and control” wheel.

What becomes apparent is that the weight of Christian scripture attests to the fact that women are created in the image of God, and Jesus reaffirmed the value of women as capable persons who should have the same options as men. However, very early in Christian history, something happened to change the Church’s move toward full inclusiveness. To answer why would divert from the intent of this booklet, which is to focus on churches’ response to victims of domestic violence. But it’s important to see these wheels as symbols of what the patriarchal system has meant to women. Although there are several significant quotations encircling the “Women Created in God’s Image” wheel, none carry the same weight as those prescriptions spoken by the Church “fathers,” who in many cases systematized Christian theology. This is the heritage received by all women. Because of this heritage, many centuries passed before women were allowed to own property; to vote; to decide whether, or

whom to marry; and to speak the Word of God. Because of this heritage, many centuries passed before women were no longer subject to the chastising of their husbands by any means, including domestic violence.

Source: Jeri Gray-Reneberg, M. Div., for *“Domestic Violence: Focus Guide for Clergy and Religious Leaders,”* Family Violence Council of Lincoln/Lancaster County and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, 1996.

Quotes Referenced in the “Women Created in God’s Image as Equal to Men” Wheel

“There is one teacher, namely Christ, and ... in his spirit there are no distinctions between persons, nor any reason of age, sex or race that elects some of domination ... combativeness in family life, whereby man and wife or parents or children strive to assert a supremacy of will, is non compatible with the conviction that there is that of God in everyone.”

- 1972 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Society of Friends, (Quakers)

“And though, possibly, an earthly mother may suffer her child to perish, our heavenly Mother Jesus can never suffer us who are his children to perish. For he is almighty, all-Wisdom and all-Love.”

- Dame Julian of Norwich, Medieval mystic

“I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethren is that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on the ground which God has designed for us to occupy.”

- Sarah Grimke, Quaker abolitionist

“Men who repress themselves the ‘feminine’ side of their nature will generally ... be anti-feminine ... the woman most in need of liberation is the woman in every man. When at last this woman is liberated – along with the man in every woman – our homes, the churches, and the world, will be much better places. There can no longer be true community between women and men unless that community is based on full equality.”

- Reverend William Sloane Coffin

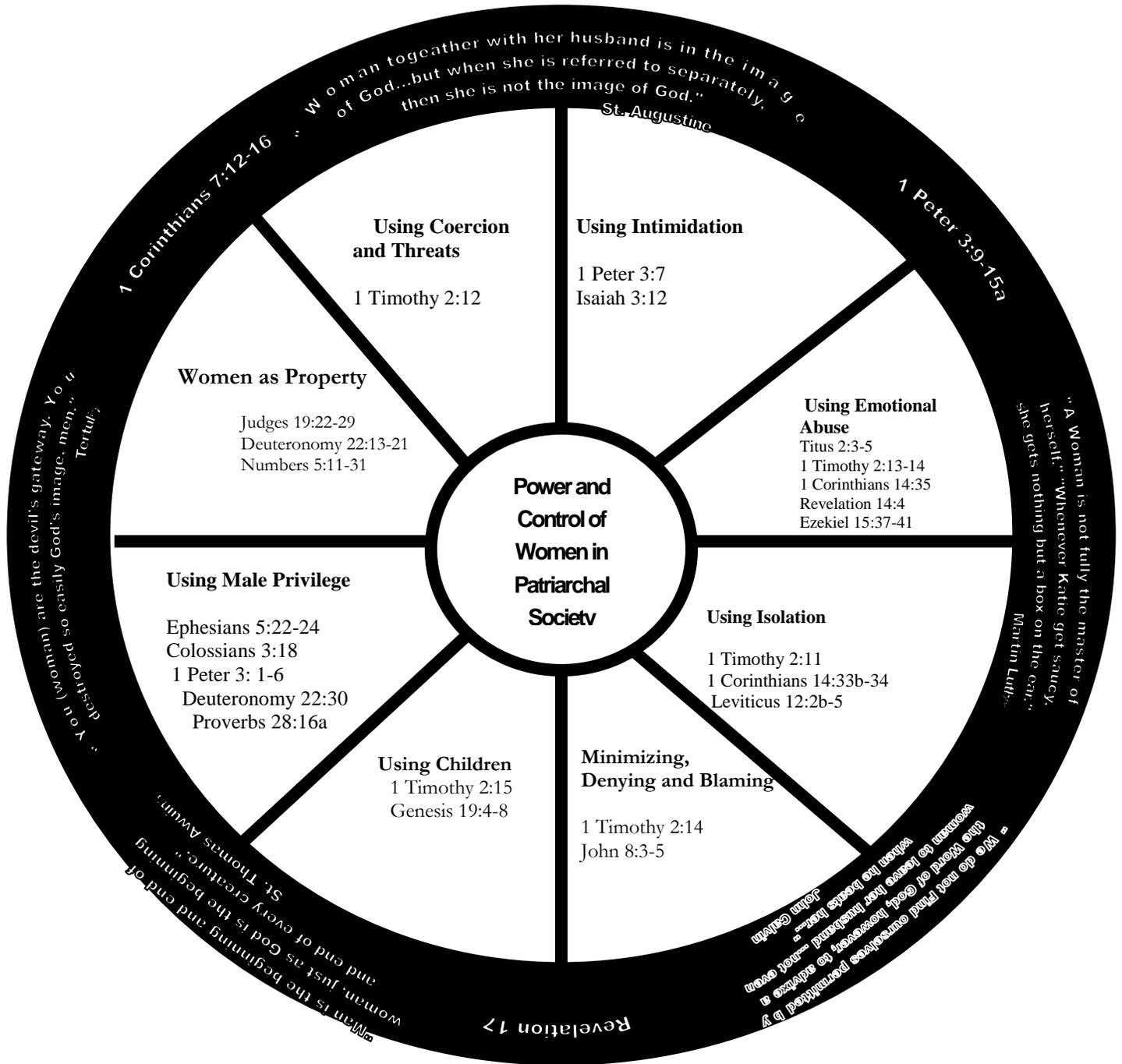
“If she has the necessary gifts, and feels herself called by the Spirit to preach, there is not a single word in the whole book of God to restrain her, but many, very many, to urge and encourage her. God says she SHALL do so ...”

- Catherine Booth, Holiness evangelist

“It is a God-given, blood-brought privilege, and bounded duty of the women as well as the men, to preach the gospel.”

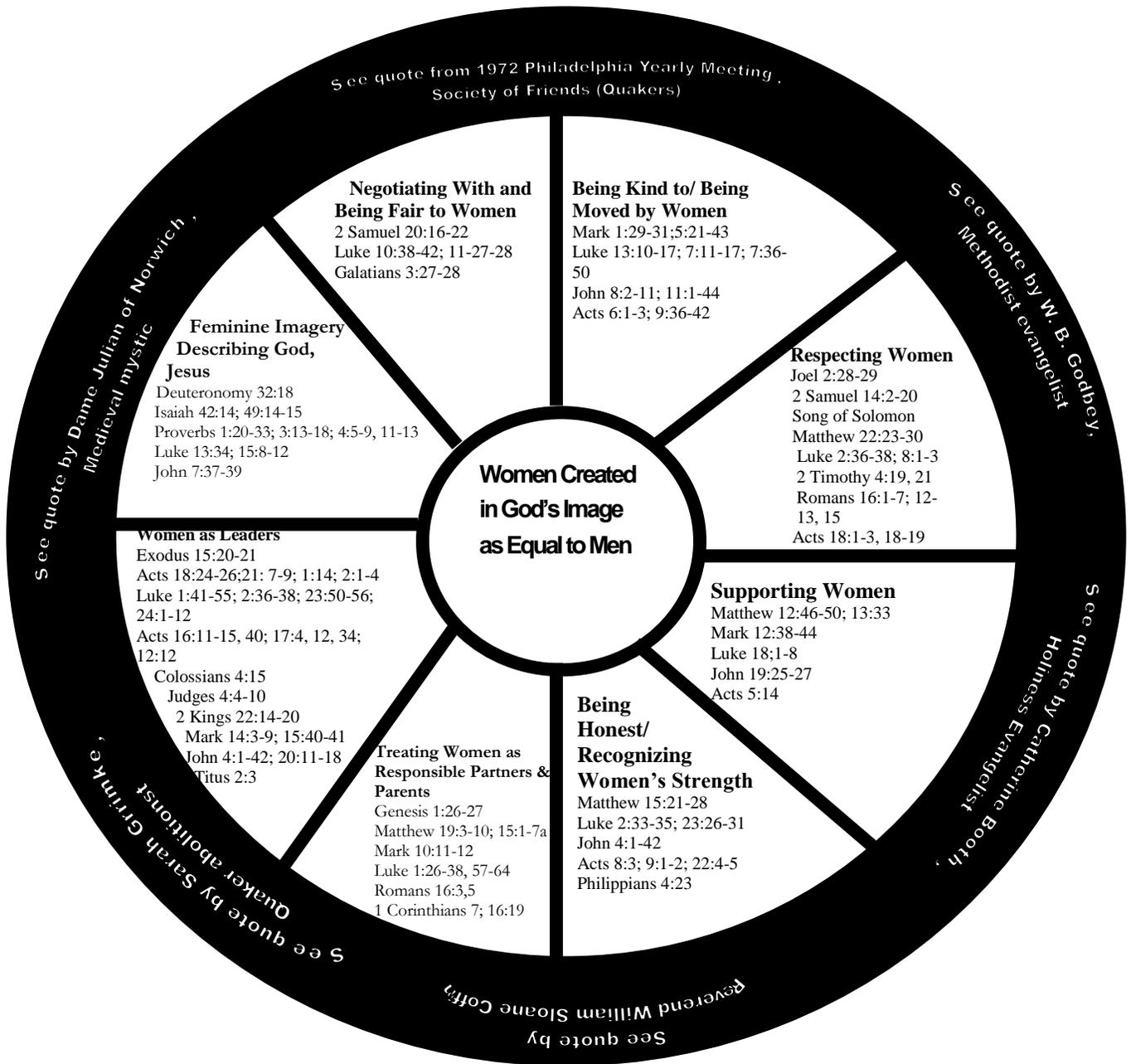
- W.B. Godbey, Methodist evangelist

Source: Jeri Gray-Reneberg, M. Div., for “*Domestic Violence: Focus Guide for Clergy and Religious Leaders*,” Family Violence Council of Lincoln/Lancaster County and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, 1996.



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