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EDITORIAL

What has happened to the solemn statement in which the Church asserted, some forty years ago, that: "The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved" (*Gaudium and Spes*, n. 29)? Although voices have been, and are being raised from all over the world and within the Church, asking for the "Empowerment of women", we have, unfortunately, to admit that the gap between these awe-inspiring declarations of the Church and their concrete realization remains wide and quasi unfathomable. The way to systemic changes is still long and arduous.

"Empowerment of Women in the Church and Societies", is a snapshot of a survey on the situation of women in India. **Prof. Rita Noronha** in presenting the result of the survey to the Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), urges them to break the mindset and find adequate and meaningful ways to address the structural framework responsible for discrimination against women. Nevertheless, Prof. Rita recognizes that "Women are on the move". Wherever women have higher and professional education, they are visible in all the spheres of society. They are asserting their dignity both individually and collectively. Last January 9-12, 2010, the CBCI took up the issue of the empowerment of women. Yet systematic changes are still a dream!

Violence against women, a global and epidemic reality, has both structural and ideological bases. The role of feminist theologians is to endeavour to uproot these bases and offer the best sources for drawing forth living water for a world free of violence. This is a powerful message **Sabine Plonz** is conveying to the readers as she delves into "Feminist Theology and Overcoming Violence", made possible by her research.

Another feminist theologian, **Marcia Moya**, an Ecuadorian, describing the "Las mujeres y sus experiencias de Dios", is in full agreement with Sabine Plonz. Marcia underscores the manipulation of images of a God presented as the defender of the oppressed; whereas, meantime, oppressors keep on ill-treating women. The liturgical language discriminates women too. Therefore women have to rediscover the specific characteristics of their spiritual experiences. This means creating a contextualized theology that embodies women's practices and brings forth their experience of the divine presence in daily life which they express in a syncretism that is both cultural and religious. Women have to become the protagonists of such an enterprise.

Women are, as are men, created in God's image and have equal dignity and are equally children of God. Women have to resist any notion that they lack potential. Like the women in the Bible, women today must be present at all levels of the Church's life and ministry. **Sabine Demel** has developed this theme in a very pertinent way: "Beloved Children of God? Women in the Catholic Church". Her insights about the place and the role of women in the Bible are very significant: "Jesus was an advocate for women who experienced social and moral discrimination and were marginalized". Jesus called women to "hear his word and to receive the gifts of the Kingdom". In Luke's Gospel three women were in "high standing".

The research on the fourth Gospel shows that Jesus, in his public life established relationships with both men and women. The call to discipleship which implied faith in Jesus, personal adherence to his teaching, was addressed to both men and women. In John's Gospel women exercised leadership roles, for instance, Mary Magdalene was Apostle of the Apostles! **Peter Hongliang Xing** in his thoroughgoing study on: "Leadership des femmes dans la communauté johannique", introduces Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman, Martha, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene as Jesus' disciples.

The feminist theologian Sabine Demel affirms that, "No negative word is said about women in the entire Gospel tradition". "Nothing from Jesus' mouth establishes a principle that says: 'women are excluded from tasks that are entrusted to men'" (J. Leenhardt and F. Blanke). And Pope John Paul II in his beautiful Encyclical *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988) upheld the same conviction: "In all of Jesus' teaching, as well as in his behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women so prevalent in his day. On the contrary, his words and works always express the respect and honour due to women ... (his) way of speaking to and about women, as well as his manner of treating them, clearly constitutes an 'innovation' with respect to the prevailing customs at that time". If so, how do we explain this kind of discrepancy within the Church? Systemic changes are really far away!

Sister Nenzili MBOMA, FMM
SEDOS Executive Director

Prof. Rita Noronha

Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society

(PART I)

"Every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent" (Gaudium et Spes, n. 29, 7 December 1965).

"The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a Spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling" (Mulieris Dignitatem, n. 1, 15 August 1988) [The Council's Message to Women, 8 December 1965], AAS 58, 1966, nn. 13-14).

"In all of Jesus' teaching, as well as in his behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women so prevalent in his day. On the contrary, his words and works always express the respect and honour due to women ... (his) way of speaking to and about women, as well as his manner of treating them, clearly constitutes an 'innovation' with respect to the prevailing custom at that time" (Mulieris Dignitatem, n. 13).

Respected brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ

The significant decision made by those of you who are leaders of the Catholic Church in India to focus on the theme of "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society" at the General Assembly of CBCI is a cause of joy because it is the first time in the history of the Catholic Church in India that this theme has been chosen as the focus of the Plenary Assembly of Bishops. This Assembly will be of historical significance for the Church depending upon what concrete measures follow the deliberations on the subject. The process set in motion for the preparation of the General Assembly, such as meetings and conferences at the national and regional levels, has itself been an enriching experience for those, including myself, who have been a part of the collective process of reflection and dialogue. In this paper I shall seek to the best of my ability to highlight the collective ideas expressed by many dedicated women and men, including religious, on the subject. At the same time, insights have been drawn from the theoretical knowledge and experience gained from personal and collective engagement in fields such as the promotion of children's, women's and farmers' rights, the preparation and use of gender sensitive educational materials and research on the subject of relations of power.

I. The Catholic Church and the Women's Question: Sources of Inspiration

The sources of inspiration for the Church to seek change in the subordinate situation of women are many.

1. Time of Jesus, Early Christian Traditions and Women

The movement of women's empowerment could definitely be traced to Jesus for whom the empowerment of women against all forms of bondage, poverty, suffering, disease, untouchability, sexual slavery and adultery, was a priority. The women who associated with Jesus were empowered women; they collaborated with Jesus as equals and participated in his table fellowship. Many women were collaborators in the movement initiated by Jesus. They accompanied him during his public ministry along with his male disciples. The women were the first apostles to build communities of believers through their proclamation (Samaritan woman). They were the first witnesses of the Resurrection. The early Christian women

showed exemplary courage in bearing witness to Christ in the face of persecution. They not only preached the Gospel, but also established house churches. Christianity attracted women because it enabled them to overcome entrenched patriarchal taboos, judgmental attitudes and the biases of the Jewish religion/society. Christianity reasserted the dignity of women as worthy persons. In its long history the Church has been peopled with powerful women, military leaders, judges, chatelaines and controllers of property, many of whom are revered as Saints.

2. Social Teachings of the Universal Church

Time and again the Church leadership has emphasized the need to reassert the dignity of women in the Church and society, and has called upon all the Church bodies, at the global, national or local levels, to contribute to the process of enabling women to realize their full potential. Since the early 1960s, the Social Teaching of the Church (STC) has expressed ever more clearly the Church's understanding of the vocation of women in society and the Church. While denouncing the terrible and manifold oppression of women, the STC has highlighted the positive contribution of women throughout history. Considering the growing awareness of women as a "sign of the times" (*Pacem in Terris*, n. 41) and the process of women's liberation as substantially positive (JOHN PAUL II, 1995, *Letter to Women*, n. 6), the Church has proclaimed the essential equality of all human beings and condemned every type of discrimination (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 29). She recognized women's "equal rights to participate in cultural, economic, social and political life" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 13, 14 May 1971) and welcomed their indispensable participation in the Church's life and ministry (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 9, and *Justice in the World*, n. 42, 31 August 1975). Pointing out that human "conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women" and "has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity", John Paul II affirmed the need for an effective campaign for the dignity and promotion of women in all areas of life, for this is "a part of God's plan for humanity" (*Letter to Women*, n. 3 and n. 6).

3. Social Teachings of the Indian Church

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) reaffirmed the STC and contextualized it for our country. Besides denouncing the exploitation of women through various traditions and modern influences (e.g., GBM 1979 and 1996 *Final Statement*), the Bishops highlighted the unique contribution of women to the mission of the Church (GBM 1974, *Final Statement*, 27). They also proclaimed the "right of women to be equal partners in marriage" (GBM 1996 *Final Statement*, 4.2). The Bishops moreover promised that they would stand up for the dignity and rights of women, provide them educational empowerment and a proper formation for their mission, ensure them representation and even leadership roles in Church organizations, and help create proper conditions for this in the Church and society. In GBM 1984 (*Final Statement*, IV), they expressed their support for the "efforts being made by women to free themselves from every kind of exploitation in the family and society". Moreover, the Bishops recognized in 1988 that women "have not yet obtained full equality in the Christian community. They are not given their due place". The Bishops also condemned violence against women as the result of inhuman and unchristian attitudes and sadly admitted that "women feel discriminated against even in the Church". In GBM 1996 (*Final Statement*, 2.7) they criticized the economic policies of the country and "the lack of a social and political will to take seriously the constitutional directives on universal compulsory primary education, women's equality and every citizen's right to live with dignity".¹

4. Action Oriented Contributions to Women's Development/Empowerment

Ever since a secular and open education was promoted by the missionaries in early times, the Church-related institutions have been in the forefront of providing opportunities for education (formal and non-formal) to women of all communities, particularly Christians. Many girl children from all castes and communities were able to gain access to education for the first time in schools run by missionaries. This has contributed significantly to the development of women. The Church's health care networks are also present in various parts of the country. As a result many women, leaders, educators, professionals, activists and initiators of other social services (both Christian and others), have emerged. Through the

developmental interventions, Church bodies have focused upon promoting the organization of marginalized women and men (jointly or singly), and have facilitated their visibility and active role in tackling issues related to their economic deprivation and social marginalization. Church-inspired initiatives in various parts of India have contributed to the active participation of marginalized women in local self-governance. Innovative services initiated and sustained by the Church and related religious and secular groups (including those under women's leadership) for the welfare, development and promotion of health care among women have received public recognition. Church leaders, both religious and lay (women and men), have also taken a stand against human rights (inclusive of women's rights) violations and have inspired many others to join in this process. The Women's Commission at the CBCI level, and women's commissions, desks and councils at the regional and diocesan levels have played a major role in keeping the question of women alive. *Caritas* India has established a gender department and a gender policy is in place. So has the Church in Tamilnadu. However, whether these initiatives contribute to the cause of women will depend on the freedom and opportunities that are provided for their effective functioning and the quality of leadership of the religious and lay men and women.

5. Feminist Theology: The Insurrection of Suppressed Memories

Influenced by the divergent feminist movements and perspectives that have emerged in the northern and the southern nations of the world, women and men feminist theologians have sought to unearth the dimensions of theology that have elements of liberation. Feminist theology questions some of the premises of conventional theology which did not recognize full humanity to women as persons created along with men in the image of the divine. It questions the patriarchal appropriation of the Scriptures and traditions and the distortions that have entered into the theological, liturgical (prayers, hymns) and canonical sources, the biological essentialism or determinism that permeate the conventional theological discourse, leading to the prioritization of the mother and wife roles of women to the exclusion of her other roles and responsibilities as partners in building a more humane and just Church and society. It also criticizes the perceptions that see the women's role as being complementary to men's and take the male as the norm driving women to the margins; the concentration in the hands of men of the leadership or decision making/ resource control and allocation roles in Church-based institutions, while allocating to women the subordinate roles of nurturers, care givers, unpaid or lowly paid workers, and other forms of discrimination, behaviourally and systemically manifested in the Church and in society at many levels. It seeks to end the marginalization, discrimination and exclusion (silence and invisibility) to which the women (religious/lay) have been subjected in the Catholic Church.

Such a critique has naturally provoked a lot of defensive reactions from those who think feminist theology goes against the traditions and conventions of the Church universal and indigenous culture. However, by openness to these 'women-centric perceptions' the voices from the margins nurture a healthier dialogical climate that benefits the Church and society immensely.

II. The Contemporary Scenario of Gender Relations

We live in an increasingly globalized world. In order to understand the context of the subordination of women in particular and gender inequalities in general, it is necessary to look at the global and national *scenarios* in this regard.

1. The Emerging Global Picture

Research studies and many narratives of recent lived experiences with some hunting and food-gathering groups, small scale pre-industrial societies and other Adivasi or indigenous people, on various continents, reveal that many of these societies are characterized by an egalitarian cooperation and sharing. Egalitarian gender relations were seen not only between men and women but also among women and men as groups. There were virtually no reports of domestic violence among them. Further, there is evidence that the economically developed northern countries of Europe, those that have attained a higher degree of income equality (i.e. Sweden, Norway), show a higher status of women in relation to men. Those countries where there is high economic inequality (e.g., U.S. and England) manifest not only higher levels of gender disparity,

but also high levels of social inequality between and within various ethnic (race, kinship, religion and nationality based) groups. In short, there is evidence to show that in those societies where there is a dominant male hierarchy, there is more domination over women, whereas in more egalitarian, sociable societies where physical power, position and authority count less, the women's status is showing improvement.

However, generally in various countries of the world, many women face some form of discrimination as a subordinated sex group. Various international conferences (Vienna, 1993, Cairo, 1994, Copenhagen, 1994, Beijing, 1995, Beijing and New York, 2005) have highlighted the gross forms of discrimination against, and atrocities on, women that are prevalent in many nations across the world. Statistics show that the killing of women, though it exists in various forms the world over, is quite high in countries such as China, India, Korea, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Sexual and domestic violence have deep roots in many mainstream northern as well as southern cultures. Asian men settlers abroad (in the U.S. and England) have been found to be among the most violent wife abusers in the developed countries. Housework continues to be least shared. The use of women's bodies (increasingly that of men's too) as sex objects or commodities in ads and films, pornography especially child pornography, child sex abuse and teenage girl pregnancies are emerging as issues of concern in the developed countries. The increasing rates of divorce and marital conflict and the resultant effects on child and adult mental health are also a manifestation of the social crisis that is facing the Western world. The trafficking of women and girls for sex and slavery is another issue with a global dimension. Positions of governance in political institutions such as parliaments, cabinets and high level government departments and the judiciary, continue to be predominantly in the hands of men in most countries. The exceptions are countries such as Norway, which are deliberately moving in the direction of an equitable representation of women in governmental structures/cabinets and legislatures and an equal access to education and jobs.

The contribution of women throughout history, and at present, to various fields such as agriculture, crafts, science, community building, freedom struggles, ecology and human rights movements and peace building, health care and healing is not adequately recognized. Their life sustaining knowledge and experience remain sidelined. There is evidence to show that the credit for the scientific discoveries made by women have been reaped by some male scientists including Nobel laureates. The mainstream knowledge of human sciences, technologies and professional disciplines (engineering, medicine, management, psychiatry, social work, law and environmental studies) continues to be rooted in patriarchy.

However, it is heartening to note that there is some awakening at the global level. An increasing number of women and men are questioning injustices committed against women and especially against people of the marginalized groups. There is a growing realization that if there is inclusive/equitable sustainable development, then there will be justice, peace and good health for all. An immense amount of feminist work in all fields of human knowledge inclusive of history, literature, sociology, anthropology and psychology is beginning to be recognized.

2. The Indian scenario

The situation of women in India has not remained static through history. The effects of the forces for diversity, social change are reflected in the geographic (local, sub-regional and regional), ethnic (kinship, caste, religion and community), and economic (wealth/vocation based), that we observe across the length and breadth of India.

i. Resistance to Gender Inequality

The factors that have been associated with women's struggle for equality in India are as follows:

- a. Early struggles against domination/discrimination: The liberative roles assumed by women and men in their struggle for justice, inclusive of gender-justice, in the early periods of history have been highlighted in the oral folk narratives and literary and scriptural traditions, Dravidian (Sangam literature), Jain, Vedic, and the later versions of these traditions, that are region-specific. These prove that women and socially concerned men did not put up with injustice and exploitation in silence even during traditional times. The missionary-initiated secular educational institutions contributed to the spread of the ideas of equality and liberty.

- b. The social reform movements led by pre-Independence reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy were instrumental in getting the British to pass specific laws to protect the interests of certain categories of women and children (i.e., the abolition of *sati*, child marriage and promotion of widow remarriage). The emergence of women's movements with their unique Indian features also contributed to the emergence of feminist consciousness. The women's movement emerged as part of the freedom struggle by focusing on the struggles of marginalized groups such as the peasants, Dalits, Adivasi People and unorganized labourers. Ecological and human rights perspectives became integral to these movements. The women's movement under the leadership of articulate middle class women was instrumental in getting a number of progressive laws passed by the Indian Parliament to safeguard the rights of women such as reservation in local governance bodies (*panchayats*, towns and city corporations). One more recent legislative intervention is the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2007.
- c. The Constitution of India, which upheld the equality, liberty and fraternity of all Indians and guaranteed fundamental rights and liberties irrespective of gender, class, caste and creed, was a major force that provided and provides strength to women in their search for a life of dignity and respect in partnership with men.
- d. The Human Rights declarations and covenants to which India is a signatory, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women can be utilized by women and concerned men to claim entitlements and positive discriminatory measures.
- e. Civil society organizations have also played a significant role in contributing to the welfare, development and protection of the rights of women, in urban areas to a larger extent than in the rural and tribal.

ii. Breaking the Silence: Images of Visibility

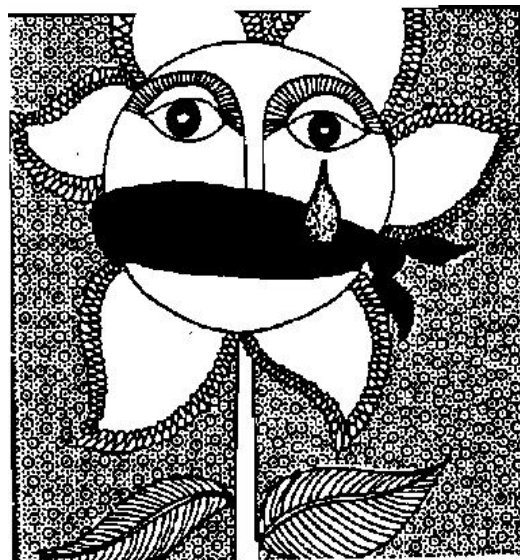
Compared to the past, there are some positive changes in the situation of women. An increasing number of women have acquired education, including higher and professional education. Women in schools and colleges and professional institutions are performing much better than male students. Women are visible in all spheres of society, even those fields considered in the past to be male bastions (i.e., the police and defence forces, including the air force). They have started articulating their concerns and asserting their dignity both individually and collectively. Women are on the move.

iii. Increase in legally prohibited crimes on women and girls

However, despite all the efforts to change the situation of women, there is enough evidence to show that behind every woman who is a visible progressive face of the so-called resurgent India, there are thousands who suffer atrocities. A few facts follow:

There are thousands of girls who are killed in their mother's womb before they are born, or die due to neglect or infanticide after birth. The falling sex ratio in the 0-6 age group is an alarming sign. There were only 945 and 927 girls per 1,000 boys according to the 1991 and 2001 census respectively, a fall of 18 girls per 1,000 boys within a decade. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS -3 held in 2005-2006), whose Report was released in the second week of October 2007, the ratio of the population in the 0-6 age group is 918 girls for every 1,000 boys. Son-preference leading to sex selective termination of female foetuses is considered responsible for the same.

The family that is supposed to be a haven of love, protection and security for all turns out to be an avenue of violence towards women. As many as 37 per cent of ever-married women reported having experienced physical violence at the hands of their spouses and 16 per cent



spoke of emotional violence only. Totally 53 per cent of women have reported violence of one type or another. Domestic violence to women appears to be increasing in proportion to the stress, conflict and competition of the capitalist/global economy. Far worse, more than 50 per cent of women believed that it was justifiable for husbands to beat their wives on certain grounds. Only one out of four abused women sought help to end the violence (NFHS -3, 2007). A large majority of them chose to bear it in silence — a manifestation of internalized patriarchy by women.

Thousands of women are tortured, killed and driven to suicide by the menacing demands for a dowry and others associated with marriage, which is one of the new manifestations of India in transition (bride price, dowry and economic transactions associated with marriage were known in the past, but not murder and torture for a dowry as we find today). The incidence of kidnapping, abduction and acid attacks on women on the one hand, and rape and molestation on the other, continue to show a rising trend. While efforts are being made to systematically weaken the traditional practices of *devadasi* and bonded labour, many thousands of women (among them many teenagers and children) are caught in the web of trafficking for sex and slave labour.

Atrocities against women in India

Type of Crime	Year of Enumeration		
	2003	2004	2005
Rape (reported cases)	15,847	18,233	18,359
Kidnapping and Abduction	13,296	15,578	15,750
Dowry Deaths	6,208	7,026	6,787
Cruelty by husband and relatives	50,703	58,121	58,319
Molestation	32,939	34,569	34,175
Dowry prohibition	2,684	3,592	3,204
Total	1,21,677	1,37,119	1,36,594

Source: National Commission for Women (Times of India 22/6/2007)

There were 7,618 cases of dowry deaths and 2,276 cases of dowry linked suicides registered in 2006. However the cases under the Dowry Prohibition Act increased to 4,504 (National Crime Records Bureau, 2007). The Report of the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), 2006, notes that there has been a rise in the total incidence of crimes committed against women, over the years.

More than 50 per cent of the girls in India are married off before their bodies are mature enough for the functions of marital life and child bearing, thus destroying their joyful childhood — the worst form of child labour visible in the villages/slums of India (NFHS, 2007).

The decline in the general fertility rate among women is a positive finding. However, the fertility rate remains high among the non-literate marginalized women, especially Dalits and Adivasis. The reproductive health of the rural women and adolescent girls is at high risk (NFHS, 2007).

iv. Hidden Face of Gender Discrimination

Often only those acts that go against the Indian Penal Code and other legislative measures such as those listed in the table above are considered as being acts of violence or atrocities against women. Such a perception hides the systemic face of patriarchal power, which is manifested in day to day acts of discrimination against girls/women and men/boys. We tend to ignore the fact that the social environment generated by the systemic forces gives rise to overt acts of discrimination. Systemic violence or discrimination against women is manifested through the following acts:

- Verbal (linguistic) and non-verbal gestures, which belittle girls/ women and uphold boys/

men and thus undermine the self-image of women. The day-to-day put downs girls/women experience at home and outside, makes them fearful and docile.

- Burdening women's or girl's body with multiple roles/tasks (housework, marital duties, child bearing, employment, community building work, caring for the elderly and sick), without giving equitable responsibility to men/boys in all those tasks that can be performed by them, results in irreparable damage to women's health and psyche.

- Practices of denial of entitlements (rights and freedoms) just because they are girls are detrimental to their holistic development.

- Disciplinary strategies of repressing boys to make them masculine and aggressive (Annex-1 — Masculine Boy), and women to be docile and self-sacrificing (Annex-11— A Reading for Two Women) harm both.

- Day-to-day presentations/programmes provide visibility and voice to men while keeping women invisible and silent.

- The bridal tests which many girls have to endure.

- The inability of thousands of women to marry but who are forced to remain celibate because they have no wealth and other physical attributes to attract proposals.

- The suffering and condemnation endured by victims of rape and trafficking and unwed mothers and widows through no fault of their own causing them lifelong psychological harm.

- Traditions and norms that deny decision-making or freedom of choice in day-to-day affairs and social mobility to women (e.g., even to meet relatives and friends without the husband's permission) and on areas of great significance in their life (e.g., marriage time, marriage partner, number and spacing of children, education, work, use of one's income/ earnings) limit the scope women have to decide their own future.

- Conventions and practices that deny women opportunities and skills to care for themselves in the right sense of the word lead them to neglect their own physical and mental health.

- Various indignities heaped on the woman's body in the name of beauty parades, modelling and advertisements, recruitment for acting and jobs, cosmetic surgery and unhealthy beauty products.

- The increasing incidence of mental illness, especially depression, which women suffer from is a result of the overt and hidden acts of abuse they undergo.

This hidden dimension of the patriarchy system has to be shown up and analyzed in order to plan and take the appropriate steps to facilitate the empowerment of women.

v. The Manifest and Hidden Face of Multiple Discrimination: Gender, Class and Caste

There is another category of effects that are manifested in the lives of the marginalized groups of women in particular and women and men in general in our class and caste divided societies.

The issue of livelihood security and related income, food, health and education, is a major concern. The evidence from the recent All India Census (2001) and surveys such as National Family Health Survey, 2007, National Sample Survey and many other research studies by national and international organizations present an extremely depressing picture of hunger, drudgery, ill-health and dehumanized life in the villages and slums of India. This finding mirrors the reality and strikes us during our visits to these areas — the haggard faces of women and men (and children as well), the environment of degradation in which millions of our brothers and sisters are condemned to live and die, the diseased bodies lying on soiled beds in the corners of their huts, are structural effects of the process of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion directed in particular against the poorest communities such as the Dalits, Adivasi people, and other backward castes and minorities.

It is important to note here that it is the women of the marginalized groups who suffer the worst forms of indignity, deprivation and violence because of their subordinate position in the gender, caste, class hierarchies. They suffer the most from insecurity of livelihood as they are concentrated in the sheer subsistence sectors of the economy; their tiny farms and self-employment ventures produce the least. Often the ownership titles to these assets are not in their own name. They are the least paid and most exploited by their employers, however burdensome their work might be. As many as 20

per cent of rural households are found to be female headed, which means they have to manage their family without any help from the male. Women age faster than their men counterparts because of the drudgery of their lives. An increasing incidence of trafficking of Dalit and Adivasi girls has been highlighted by many studies (NFHS, 2007, Frontline, 22 Dec 2007). Marginalized women suffer most from lack of food, health care and education. Their bodies are exposed to many diseases due to lack of nutrition, use of polluted water and occupational hazards. They remain either illiterate or with little education. The decreasing availability of essential facilities, such as piped water supply and clean drinking water and access to fuel for cooking and lighting, increase the work burden and suffering of these women.

Both the visible and hidden face of the subordination of women, especially of women and men of the marginalized groups, has to be unveiled to understand the depth of suffering that women and men undergo everywhere in some contexts and places, much more than in others. This process of giving them visibility or voice is part of the agenda of the process of the empowerment of women in particular, and of women and men of the marginalized groups in our society in general.

vi. Men and Boys too, Pay a Heavy Price

There is much research evidence to show that men bear similarly severe adverse effects from gender inequality and subordination as women. Some of which are:

- Men are not free to develop and openly express the feminine traits, the seeds of which are within them.
- Many acquire and manifest traits of domination and manipulation.
- Many manifest an aggressive/violent temperament.
- Many lack behaviour that promotes well being of self and others.
- Many suffer from stress, emotional illness and addiction to various vices/objects/machines.
- Many have a distorted/manipulative style of interpersonal relations.
- Many contribute to marital disharmony, separation and divorce.
- Many engage in violent conflicts, war and communal and criminal acts.

The findings of the research studies summarized by Wilkinson reveal that not only women but also men reap the benefits of income as well as gender equality.

In the northern (so-called developed) nation societies where there is a higher level of income equality, men were found to live longer and healthier lives. The male mortality and morbidity rates were higher than among women in societies where there are wider inequalities based on income and gender. In societies where there are hierarchies of dominance, men suffer more from the injury, anxiety and stress caused by the competitive process for power. They engage in more risk-taking behaviour such as reckless driving, exposure to HIV/AIDS because of unsafe sex, smoking and alcohol consumption and other dangerous so-called masculine pursuits. In short, income inequality and male dominance cause a lot of harm to men (Studies by Kaphan *et al*, 1996; McIsaac *et al*, 1977; Walberg *et al*, 1998 and Wilkinson, 1996 cited by Wilkinson, G., 2005: 216-22.). Gender discrimination causes much more damage to the body and psyche of men. It not only alienates them from other men and women, it alienates them from their very self (the feminine aspect of their self) blocking the flow of feminine potential which lies dormant within them.

Even male children were found to bear these adverse effects in unequal societies. Their educational performance tends to decline in relation to girls', the latter maintaining the lead in all subjects through to the higher levels of education. More and more children, and in each case predominantly boys, were identified as having attention deficient hyperactive disorders, disruptive behavioural problems, learning difficulties and plain absenteeism. The analyst points out clearly that the issue is not which sex is best, but how even in childhood, the more masculine or 'macho' culture of inequality impacts boys adversely in many ways (Wilkinson, G. 2005: 223).

These findings prove the point that has always been highlighted in all our religious scripture: the relations of concern, caring, respect, in other words mutuality, reciprocity and partnership bring the greatest happiness to the human person. Both men and women engaged in such relations live more physically healthy and emotionally gratifying lives.

III. The Forces Behind Gender Inequality

1. Complexity of interrelated causes/sustains gender inequality

There are multiple interrelated causes responsible for gender discrimination/inequality. In patriarchal societies, patriarchy is at the root of gender discrimination, especially the subordination of women (Annex-IV). Patriarchal or male-headed institutions, male pro-culture and gender identities (men and women) sustain and perpetuate gender discrimination (Bhasin, 1993; 2004). The three dimensions that sustain and perpetuate patriarchy leading to discrimination against women (and men as well) shown in the diagram below are further clarified in this section.

Causes of Gender Inequality

Patriarchal Power that Works Through Strategies

Within Culture	Within Institutions
Patriarchy or patriarchal culture Ideas, Myths, Theories and Perspectives, Customs, rules, regulations, laws Linguistic concepts and statements Behavioural expressions/ actions Practices, Rituals, objects	Male dominant patterned or structured relations (Roles/positions, Rules, Resources, outcomes) Marriage Family Economic Political parties, Governmental institutions, Educational, Religious, Health, Sports, Scientific/ technological, Professional (Research/academic) and civil society (non-profit) agencies

The Patriarchal Self is a Self that has internalized patriarchy in thinking, feeling and acting behaviour that manifests gender insensitivity or bias

a. Patriarchal Culture: The culture of Patriarchy consists of all those ideas, norms, traditions, beliefs and values that uphold men and downgrade women. Women are considered to be biologically, intellectually and spiritually inferior to men, contrary to research evidence (GROSS, 1987, Internet Website: Mito-Chondriai Eve, 2007). Attributes associated with men are considered to be strengths, whereas those associated with women are considered weaknesses. Objects and symbols associated with men (i.e. trousers, moustache) assume superiority and those associated with women (i.e. sarees, skirts, and bangles) are held to be of inferior or of lower value. Such notions permeate the minds of individuals (men and women) and influence their thinking, feeling and acting behaviour towards people. These ideas and beliefs are transmitted from one generation to the next, from one cultural group to another through language (spoken and written), gestures and postures and audio-visual images and symbols. Folk stories, proverbs, dramas and song were effective channels for passing on patriarchal messages in traditional societies. In modern society the mass media channels, such as newspapers, magazines, films, film songs, television programmes and advertisements, play a major role in transmitting stereotyped notions and beliefs about women and men. The clear message that runs through all cultural messages and symbols is that the male is superior and the female is inferior, the former is strong and the latter is weak. The counter-cultural messages that question these stereotypes do emerge as a result of the protest by the subordinated, but remain subjugated.

b. Patriarchal Structures/Institutions: Systemic root of inequalities/discrimination: Social institutions or structures are made up of people. They are formed by people or developed by people and altered by people, at various historical junctures, by introducing new roles or positions, rules, resources and practices to meet human needs and desires (i.e., family, farm, factory, office, workshop, banks, cooperatives, NGO's, parliaments, cabinets, government departments, political parties, places of worship, schools and colleges). These structures may be participatory/democratic/egalitarian or non-participatory/authoritarian/

hierarchical. The former are based on partnership, mutuality, reciprocity and inclusion and the latter are based on domination, subjugation, exclusion and competition. Once established and developed, highly structured institutions assume a life of their own. Participatory structures generate processes that form more equitable social identities that collaborate in decisions and actions (whereas the hierarchical structures rooted in patriarchal, domination and disciplinary processes form and fix unequal identities). Resistance though inevitable within such relations is overcome through the process of self-discipline or subjectification, namely, by helping all the role-based social identities to become docile, unquestioning collaborators in the process of disciplining self and others.

In a patriarchal social order all social structures or institutions are based on the non-participation (or peripheral participation) of women in decisions and governance in the family (private sphere) and society (public sphere of economy, polity, education, media, religion and civil society). Such a society is also based on inclusion of the same class, caste, *élite* men, and the exclusion of women with a family and men and women of the marginalized groups from governance/decision making, as well as ownership and control over resources. In other words, institutions in societies where there are inequalities based on gender, ethnicity (race, caste, kinship and religion), manifest differences through inclusion and exclusion, centralization or marginalization, and control over material resources of knowledge, products of labour, rules and norms, as well as ideas. Male dominant hierarchies by their very nature sustain and reinforce inequalities between men, women and men, and between women themselves. In other words, negative discrimination against subordinates and positive discrimination in the case of superiors (individuals or groups) is built into all aspects of these institutions. Even if a woman were to be appointed to the leadership/headship of such an institution, there is no guarantee that it would not continue to be patriarchal in ethos, unless highly gender-sensitive individuals or groups (women and men or both) were able to model alternatives.

In societies where there are strong hierarchies that incorporate men, there is also high domination of men over women. When there is more inequality among men, women lose out both physically and economically. The men who feel subjugated and dominated in their work or other areas of life seek to regain their sense of authority and masculine image by exerting more control over women, their labour (productivity), sexuality (purity), fertility (reproductivity) as well as mobility. Research studies have brought out the fact that unequal/ patriarchal societies are constituted to be tougher, competitive and aggressive, where processes of downward discrimination and violence towards men and women are sustained. In such 'macho' societies 'family honour' is bound up with the male need to protect the 'honour' of the women in their family by limiting their freedom, killing or sacrificing "dishonoured" women (Wilkinson, 2005, p 218-20). The incidence of such honour killing has been reported from different parts of India, especially the north. In highly unequal societies men use women as objects of exchange or in economic transactions in order to raise their status, authority and wealth in relation to other men. The exchange of daughters and sisters in marriage with those who have the same or higher status becomes the norm. This in fact is the root of the dowry, which is assuming serious proportions in India. The bigger the income/property or job held by the groom, the higher the dowry he commands. The subordinate class/caste ethnic communities have to internalize this upper class/caste practice at a heavy cost to the women and men of these communities.

Only just social structures can change the quality of social relations/gender relations. More meaningful and trusting, life-affirming relations between human beings inclusive of women and men are only possible when the hierarchy of domination is altered in family, site of economic activity (farm, factory and workshop), education, media and religion. Merely creating better opportunities for women and attempting to tackle the so-called women's issues is not enough to alter these structures of injustice or sin. Farsighted interventions with a human-rights basis and mass-based strategic thrust may serve the purpose. So in order to transform gender relations and empower women in the right sense of the word, structures that generate and perpetuate inequalities and injustices of every type, including those based on class, caste, race, nationality, have to be altered. It has to be reiterated here that gender is not about women alone, it is about women and men and the relationship of power between them and amongst them.

c. Self: Internalization of Patriarchy or Gender Stereotypes. Both the dominant and

the dominated are formed by these structures to preserve and protect the hierarchy of rank or status and the mechanisms, practices and perceptions that sustain them. Through gender the process of socialization, boys and girls are formed to manifest the characteristics assigned to them by society. The process of stereotyping the female and the male gender role occurs in various sites of social relations: the family, neighbourhood, school and places of worship. It is a process that begins at birth (where there is sex selection in the womb itself) and goes on till death. In patriarchal institutions, in most cases, the men are superior and the women inferior (even if the women are superior in some cases, the ambience is generally patriarchal). Both men and women are disciplined to follow the patriarchal norms and values. As they are taught to feel, think and act in ways that uphold men and downgrade women, they begin to model their own thoughts, emotions and actions to suit patriarchal traditions, norms and myths. They start by ascribing superior virtues, qualities, abilities and roles to men. Then, they ascribe negative qualities, attributes and roles to women. The men develop a superior image, talk and act in assertive and dominant ways with women and subordinate men as well. Women, on the other hand, develop an inferiority complex and talk and act in a submissive and docile manner with male and female superiors and in a dominant manner with their female and male subordinates. An assertive woman begins to be branded as a 'shrew' by superiors, partners or co-workers. A non-assertive/gentle man is branded as feminine and weak. Behaviour in consonance with patriarchal expectations is rewarded and praised, and what deviates from such norms is criticized, condemned and punished.

The internalization of patriarchy by both men and women is a gradual process, which is not free from resistance by both women and men. But gradually if no opportunity to acquire gender sensitivity is available, men and women who are products or constructs of patriarchy in turn become the vehicles of patriarchy (people who discipline and form others to fit the structures of patriarchy as obedient/docile subjects). They become the allies of patriarchy in the process of sustaining and perpetuating the same. So women, without understanding this process of patriarchal genderization and internalization of patriarchy, are often blamed for sustaining patriarchy, through son-preference, gender-discrimination in homes and communities. They are blamed as being the woman's worst enemy. This is another game or strategy of patriarchy, the strategy of blaming the victim who has been turned into a perpetrator of gender discrimination, the victim/perpetrator of patriarchy.

1. A note on the family institution

A note on the situation of the patriarchal family is relevant here. 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 (ethnic-caste, tribe, religious) get reflected in the family, which is a micro unit of the macro society. Where there is patriarchal or male leadership in society or subculture, 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 '*patiparameshwar*' (God). According to the traditional custom it is the wife's duty to obey the husband and remain '*Pativrata*' or faithful to him at any cost. Moreover, women are conditioned to justify the abuse on their bodies. Many men as well as women in contemporary families carry such patriarchal baggage (NFHS - 2007, *Frontline*, 22 Dec. 2007).

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 labour tirelessly for others as carers, 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' are totally undermined. The question is how can women who are not 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 (her male and female relatives)? How can she affirm herself, her selfhood and assert her equality with men and expect from men and her children respect and caring behaviour? (*Annex-11: A Reading for Two Women*).

Where patriarchy is rooted women are taught to prefer sons to daughters. Studies show that in families/societies where patriarchal dominance and the consequent gender discrimination are found, girls/women learn to depreciate their own self or develop a very low self-image. This turns into 'self-hate', directed against daughters and daughters-in-laws. The son or male preference is built up in such families. Women who are victims of patriarchy are turned into perpetrators or sustainers of patriarchy. Without understanding this truth, women are condemned for preferring boys and for teaching gender-discriminatory behaviour to their children! Patriarchal families do not promote the mental health of women and men: Dominant/subordinate relations do not promote harmony in families. Constant nagging/complaining behaviour and the incidence of domestic violence destroy harmony in many families. The incidence of mental illness (depression among women, behavioural problems in children, emotional disturbance and addictions among men) is high in many such families. The physical health of women, men and children also suffers.

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 (India is very high on the list of the most corrupt nations in the world) and the menace of fundamentalism and communalism are factors that destroy human relationships and vitiate social harmony, including that of the family. Multiple and correlated hierarchies in every site of society, economy, polity, religion, education, which are sustained by upper class and upper caste patriarchal forces and the resultant climate of discrimination, exclusion and marginalization of women and many subordinate groups (men and women), are not conducive to harmony within self, between persons and groups (men, women), with nature, and with God. Most families reflect this disharmony.

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 (*Annex-III: Gender and Sex Distinctions*). Alas, 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.

Ø Gender sensitization involves the critical questioning of the deeply ingrained patriarchal views, myths and attitudes regarding the male and the 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* (Gross, 1987, Internet Web sites). The relative strengths (biological or genetic) that women and men possess, should in no way result in the domination of the 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".

Ø Gender sensitization involves questioning the gender/role stereotypes that are associated with women and men. 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*.

Ø Gender sensitization is praxis-centred. There is often an attempt at associating the gender sensitization process with classroom-centred 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. Gender sensitization is a sustained process of solidarity building among women and men towards the goal of gender equality.

Ø 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 ($x+x$ = female; $x+y$ = 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:

Ø Altering self — '**Power Within**': This includes deepening the critique of the internalized patriarchal self (thinking, feeling and acting behaviour). 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.

Ø 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 (i.e. Dalits, Adivasis and the subsistence farmer/unorganized labourer). It is developing life skills such as: good governance, decision making, creative problem solving, communication and human relations and management.

Ø Building Solidarity — '**Power With**': 'Power with' 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 favour.

Ø Overcoming domination, discrimination/marginalization — '**Power Over**': Empowerment involves the process of enhancing the control women have over 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 '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/programmes. 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 *milieus*, institutions and society in general. As G. Mongella (the Secretary General, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 15 Sept. 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 the 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 central and State Governments in India are making deliberate attempts to alter the situation of women by establishing ministries, departments, boards and commissions (inclusive of women's rights commissions at central and State levels). Many schemes such as the supply of nutrition supplements for pregnant women and children, running day-care centres, shelters for women in distress, counselling centres, legal aid services and help lines are being launched. But the schemes by their very nature tend to be piecemeal and symptom-centric. The women's issues are merely seen as isolated concerns that could be tackled through projects and financial allocations. The systemic forces that are responsible for the subordination of women do not figure as a part of the process. Nor is the wisdom and knowledge of women considered in the process of planning. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (NPEW) states clearly that "there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situated reality of the status of women in India on the other", admitting that the causes of gender inequality have a structural basis (Government of India, NPEW, 2001).

Some of the strategies that have been used are appearing to have adverse consequences on the empowerment of women. For instance, there is strong criticism against self-help groups or micro-finance institutions being set up in *lakhs* all over the country under the aegis of the Government, NGO's, Banks, Cooperatives, Corporate and private financial bodies. Support to micro-finance institutions through the State and NGO's by international organizations such as the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank are seen as attempts to incorporate the marginalized women into the global market at the peripheral level. These institutions have made 'money' the centre of their transactions. Women are caught in a trap of savings, loans (often with high interest) and repayments. The production-centred income generation ventures started by women, apart from a few exceptions, have failed because they are unable to compete with the corporate forces that control the markets. Loans are often used by women not for increasing production but for purchasing consumer products such as gold, T.V. and refrigerators. The marginalized women are not able to save or repay loans and so either become defaulters or are put out of membership. Some who were unable to withstand the pressure to repay loans have committed suicide (instances of such suicides have been reported in Andhra Pradesh). Women have to work doubly hard to repay the loan with little or no support from the men of the household. Women are turning out to be objects of exploitation and control by those organizations (mostly under male leadership), under whose leadership they are formed. The effort at creating awareness among them does not move beyond the level of gender sensitivity/insensitivity that prevails among the leaders and facilitators. Is there a link between the micro-finance institutions and the phenomenon of the high percentage of malnourished women and children as per the NFHS-3? Further study is required to answer the question. Strategies that give control over women to various State and civil bodies have blocked the growth of a strong women's movement in India and other Asian nations such as Bangladesh (World Social Forum, 2004).

Despite the many laws (India has a maximum number of women-centred laws in the world) and *lakhs* of NGO's working for the cause of women in India and a multiplicity of interventions avowedly to empower women, we need to ask why the son-preference is spreading among the so-called educated sections of the people — especially urban — who destroy female fetuses?

Why is affluence spreading the scourge of burning, torturing, deserting and driving to suicide thousands of women? Why are even the well-educated working women facing domestic violence? We need to analyze the strengths and limitations of all the strategies that promote the empowerment of women. The effectiveness of strategies and programmes 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. Sustaining Gender, Class and Caste Inequalities: A Neo-Liberal Global Agenda

The West-led globalization process which began with colonialism received a tremendous boost in the last 20 years after India was pressured into unprecedented economic reforms. State-abetted private control over land, credit and export-centred investments, neglect of subsistence agriculture, weakening of labour unions, erosion of rights of workers even in the organized sector, while providing incentives for corporate agrarian and industrial production. Capital intensive, cash intensive/corporate agri-business driven, export-oriented domestic policies, influenced by the global corporate-led multilateral organizations (WTO and IMF) are insensitive to subsistence communities based on farming, fishing and handicrafts. Millions of households and their erstwhile economically productive women are being pushed into situations of severe distress.

Some consequences of this process of economic reform are:

Ø The creation of highly lucrative jobs for a minority of the educated/skilled youth (i.e., about 5 *lakh* jobs in the IT/B.P.O. sector) and the visible emergence of a middle class, flaunting its wealth in conspicuous expenditure, huge bungalows and holidays abroad. Some women too have accessed a share of this prosperity.

Ø Accentuation of inequalities between men and women, and among men and women themselves, not only in society but within each endogamous groups (Jati, religious, Adivasi), affecting adversely the significant majority.

Ø The destruction of traditional livelihoods such as subsistence farming, fishing, and forest-based communities, and the erosion of their rights over land, credit, seeds and common property resources.

Ø Increased poverty, hunger, malnutrition among the marginalized, women and girls, in particular, due to food shortages (food production is declining rapidly in India) and lack of purchasing power.

Ø An escalation of violence towards the marginalized in general and women in particular. The marginalized among the Dalits, Adivasis and minorities are the worst affected.

Ø Increased dowry demands and dowry-related violence.

Ø Displacement of women from the land and making them bear the major part of the risk involved in finding other livelihoods because of policies such as subsidizing food imports. Lack of appropriate land reforms is another major policy lacuna.

Ø Forcing women to find cheap jobs as migrant domestic workers elsewhere and pushing many of them into trafficking for sex and slavery by denying them access to other vocational skills/livelihoods.

Ø The deepening of the farm crisis resulting from high input, low price farming, farmer indebtedness, has led to farmers committing suicide (suicide is not about the dead, but the living, said one report). The women of these farm households are left to carry the burden of debt. They are responsible for the survival of the family and face a future of struggle, pain and hardship.

Ø The negation of the knowledge of women and traditional communities (i.e., farming, crafts, healing of body and mind, community and peace building) and in many cases the pilfering and patenting of elements of such knowledge and their commodification for profit (i.e. Basmati rice, many herbal medicines, *yogasanas*, bio-diversity genetic pool).

Ø The harmful effects on air, water, land and forests are increasing pollution-related diseases. Women and children suffer the most. Adverse effect on men's health directly affects the women of the households. It is they who have to labour and contend with the cost of care, treatment and other adversities associated with disease.

Ø Increasing incidence of famine and floods, and increasing migration to overcrowded cities, to a life of drudgery and squalor, with serious negative effects on women and girls and men and boys.

Ø Increasing work burden and violence on women as men find escape routes to tide

over the crisis — drinking, drugs, gambling and cock fights, leaving women to fight for the survival of the family.

Ø Women are the worst affected by HIV/AIDS, whether as carriers of the virus transported by men, or as bearers of the trauma that goes with it. That the HIV positive women are sexually exploited by HIV positive men is a headline in the media these days.

It is clear that the accumulation of wealth by the upper and middle classes is strengthening the patriarchal forces further. With economic inequalities widening in the country with the global inflow of capital and ever-increasing consumerist greed, women have been turned into dispensable commodities. The competition to make money at any cost means the ruthless exploitation of women.

5. 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 is occurring side by side with unprecedented prosperity are 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 caste/religious group, and atrocities against those who are considered as enemies. In India the inhuman acts of violence unleashed on women and girls during partition, caste and community riots are clear examples. Raping women and parading them naked are seen as acts of hitting at the honour or self-image of the men of their communities. Both fundamentalism and communalism attempt to divide and rule. Not only men but also women are organized on religio-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 (i.e., as suicide bombers).

(to be continued ...)



Sabine Plonz

Feminist Theology and Overcoming Violence

According to Sabina Plonz, the contribution of feminist theology to theology, ethics, and the church should be seen primarily in terms of what it has done and continues to do to overcome violence against women. Feminist theology understands women's history as salvation history and as having the same dignity and relevance as the salvation history of men. Receiving, not sending, is the primary mission experience in today's world.

In San José, Costa Rica, in August 2003, Nidia Fonseca, a pastoral theologian at the *Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana*, addressed a group of visiting German women on the distinction between a life of poverty and a life of extreme poverty. She invited the group to visit her community, where she serves as an unpaid pastor. On Sunday a handful of women gathered in an unpretentious house of the Wesleyan Church, where there was a tiny faith community. The community was composed primarily of women who live in extreme poverty, raise their children by themselves, are unemployed, and are subject to violence.

While washing dishes before the worship service, Nidia was describing the community's daily life, while greeting the day with frank and joyful anticipation, and talking about the importance of the fellowship and the level of openness that the community had achieved. These achievements — indeed as is her life — were most remarkable and were constantly endangered by influences beyond her control. Nidia talked about the hurdles she had had to surmount on her way to establishing such a level of trust and becoming pastor of such a community. At first the women from the slums remained withdrawn; but step by step they discovered that Nidia's background was as "tragic" as their own. As a divorced single mother her personal experiences were reminiscent of their own. However, they wanted to cover up their anguish with aggressiveness. Only when they began to admit their hurt and accept it as part of their own lives could they accept one another. Only then could God's Word enter into their conversations, and only then could their experiences of violence be accepted as something which the Christian faith opposed.

Violence and feminist theology

Feminist theology is concerned with women's life experiences, which in many respects are marked by discrimination, insults to their dignity, and violence. Even though these experiences vary from country to country and according to women's social status, it is obvious that violence against women is the motive for seeking a different theology, a different pastoral practice, and a different church. The contribution of feminist theology to the areas of theology, ethics, and the Church should be seen primarily in terms of what that theology has done to overcome violence against women. In so doing, it has created a theological-historical and ecumenical novum in recent Church history.

Violence against women – a global, epidemic reality - has both structural and ideological foundations. Feminist theologians have identified this structural violence with the patriarchal violence that occurs in many professions and workplaces. At all levels of the evangelical regional churches there is the responsibility to overcome violence. The "Ecumenical Decade: Church in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998)" has a strong concern for violence against women, and especially for establishing legitimate theological ground for resisting violence. Violence is virulent. It reaches even into parsonages and rectories and is exercised as part of a "daily Christian ethic." An ordained pastor who studied at the Pacific Theological College in Fiji explained why he had severely admonished his wife: "We had guests for dinner, and she talked too much, even disagreeing with me in front of our guests. It was my Christian duty to teach her to behave as a proper wife and not embarrass me."

Feminist theology is certainly one of the best sources for drawing forth living water for a world free of violence. To have value such theology must be rooted in praxis, have a critical interpretive dimension, be anchored in the women's movement socially and culturally, and have socially effective political power. Furthermore its significance is not limited only to the female half of humanity.

Systematic theology

Feminist discussions about the doctrine of the Trinity are reserved insofar as that doctrine is understood metaphysically. The image of God that the Trinitarian doctrine transmits — and it is not only feminist criticism that says this — emphasises the autonomy and thus the abstractness of God. It underscores God's lordship and thus, very frequently, a covenant between God and those who rule. Feminist theologians also ask the representatives of newer, ecumenically orientated statements on "social Trinitarian doctrine" why they need to refer to a theoretical construction which allows for the grounding of suffering and the liberating of relationships within God's inner being ("himself") before they declare such experiences as theologically worthwhile. In other words, feminists ask why a Trinitarian theology "from above" must be laid out, which then has ethical consequences "in human life below." Why is it not possible to develop a "theology from below," which reflects on experiences of violence and which attempts to repudiate that violence?

Trinitarian God-talk is not a goal in itself but should help make comprehensible the relationship between the crucified and resurrected Christ with the God of the people of the covenant; and it should do so in a way that is helpful for Christian life. In the Trinitarian doctrine God's autonomy is bound up with the suffering and relationally orientated (God-) human Jesus. From the feminist perspective, for the Trinitarian doctrine of God to be acceptable to women it would have to be linked with relationally orientated (feminist) theology in such a way as to unmask and overcome violence.

Another strand of the feminist problem with the image of God is more strongly related to the Bible and is concerned with God "below." A gender-sensitive reading of the Bible makes it clear that the biblical attributes of God are drawn from actions and experiences that belong to males as well as to females — especially those that are drawn from the historical context of the time. Many times the OT speaks of God's justice and compassion in the same breath. Righteousness and practicing love or goodness are inseparably bound in this God. Appreciating the value of these different qualities and spheres of activity is an important step because women can now discover their own life experience in God's being and action. Consequently, the image of God no longer mirrors an exclusively "male world." This process however, can only be an interim goal and should not be understood as a new basis for the well-known gender ontology where ultimately justice and mercy are diametrically opposed and unilaterally ascribed to one gender or the other. Rather, a biblically orientated ethos of justice needs to integrate a stronger dimension of mercy.

Christology

Feminism's difficulty with Christology can be characterised as a dialectical movement: on the one hand it protests against Christology as a means of violence and, on the other, it raises up Christology as a protest against violence. In the Christological tradition, one recalls the critique of atonement theology where the sacrifice of Christ is abstracted from the historical process and theologically absolutised. This view of Christology concretises the violence of the crucifixion instead of laying open the death on the cross as a critique of violence.

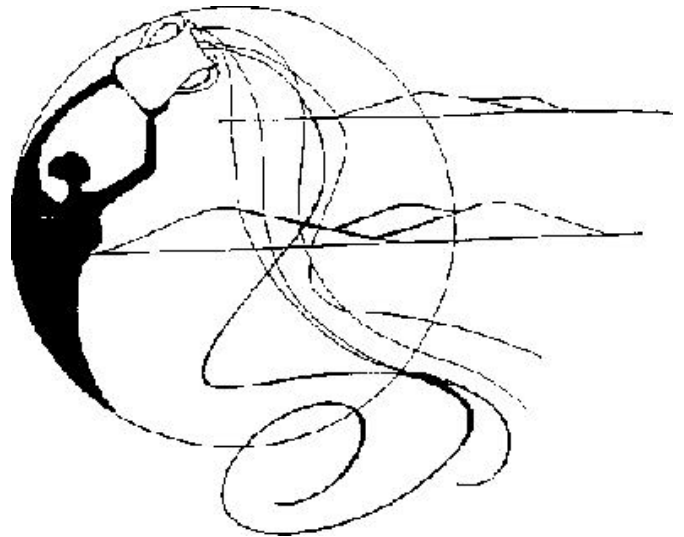
Feminist Christology, as a theological overcoming of violence, asks about the reality of the incarnation in the present, and thus urges the enculturation of Christianity, which is to be understood as an ongoing process (globally and regionally differentiated, but concrete). According to Moeawa Callaghan: "I have a keen interest in Christologies from Maori women's perspectives and within these Christologies identifying key understandings and images of Christ that foster life-affirming spiritualities for Maori in our multi-faith, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts today." (*Weaving* 5)

Feminist theology also seeks to find metaphors which take into consideration women's experiences in such a way that one can speak of "Christ today." Symbolic images of women from the Bible, history, and popular culture need to be employed and given new currency. Christology is also anthropology. It is the doctrine of marvellously concrete subjects composed of body and soul, who are created male and female, and are seen and affirmed in light of the resurrection. The establishment and empowerment of the subject is a central concern for Christian praxis. For feminist theology, as for liberation theology, the certainty of the resurrection experience is given new importance and expression. The resurrection is understood as:

- The empowerment of women and men who conquer death in this life. So a real resurrection faith depends on present experiences which can or may be interpreted as Christ/o/phany.

- An expression of God's solidarity with those who are suffering and who struggle, or as the presence of the Spirit's power (Heb.: *ruach* = [the breath, spirit, wind of God] in the concrete lives of women (and men and children).

- Protest against experiences of suffering that are frequently religiously legitimised or which demean women.



The ability to resist and to conquer violent activity becomes an experience of the Spirit, which also animated Jesus. Several historical and contemporary movements serve as signs of protest by resisting death out of a preference for life, without having to adopt or identify with the transcendent and enduringly unapproachable "Christ." Examples of such feminine praxis can be found in the women against atomic weapons in Greenham Common, the women in black in Israel/Palestine or in Bosnia, or the Liberian women involved in the peace process of 1995. What unites these women is the power of the Spirit (*ruach*), which allows Jesus to be acknowledged anew as part of a history of groups and movements.

Ethics

Just as feminist Christology seeks the restoration and affirmation of life, so it also seeks to establish theological foundations for ethics which have long since been formulated in the Christian-European tradition.

- Not only justification but also justice and not only reconciliation but also resistance to injustice are fundamental ethical ideas.

- The rejection of violence and its denunciation as sin is an expression of sanctification which must be understood concretely.

- Justification and sanctification as understood by feminist theology might be summarised as *having dignity, struggling for freedom, and renouncing sinful activities*. The Mexican exegete Elsa Tamez thinks "that a life without anxiety in the presence of violence is one of women's most coveted human rights." Tamez underscores the ethical content of justice as a consequence of the vindication of those who were brought to death through injustice. An ethic that overcomes violence fosters and supports human life, provides courage, and affects a countervailing power that leads to the realisation of human rights in the cause of inviolability and dignity.

In the end the emphasis is on two basic theoretical principles:

- a) Feminists design a new ethics of relationships that overcomes patriarchy; that is not exclusive but inclusive; that takes into consideration differences (of the subjects); and that occasionally implies separate ways of thinking about the sexes.

- b) Feminists stress the "power to act," or "gaining power through free communication" (Hannah Arendt). What Arendt means is political competency which develops from

human interaction (conversation, round-table discussion) and which supersedes the frequent violent "power over others" (Max Weber).

Ethical focus: marriage and family

Marriage and the family are still largely understood uncritically as the core of society and the locus of fundamental ethical orientation, or even as the apex of the order of creation, even though marriage and the family are globally demonstrable as the first place where violence is perpetrated against women and children. In light of this reality of violence (which was acknowledged for the first time at the 1995 Peking World Conference of Women as a human rights violation and as an object of international law), the Christian idealisation of marriage is seen as a theological legitimisation of violence. "Around 25% of the women living in Germany, through present or prior relationships or partners, have experienced some form of physical and sexual violence (or both)" (Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth).

Feminist ethics requires careful circumspection and the use of socio-scientific observations. For our Western industrial society, the thesis suggests that the structure of relationships and the gender division of labour (both of which are intimately connected) mutually reinforce one another negatively and ossify the asymmetrical sexual order. The dissolution of the post-war patriarchal welfare state and the liberal middle-class social contract of brothers (Carol Pateman) lead to the erosion of traditional lifestyles and role expectations. The feminist demands for material autonomy and the professional involvement of women gain currency in light of this new background. Social and work-place politics also have strategies for overcoming violence against women. Not marriage but the individual, not heterosexual couples but vulnerable children, the aged and the sick should be a political challenge and the norms for taxation and family politics.

Ideology, politics, and ethics are thus closely intertwined. Feminist theology can appeal to a biblical background in its argumentation for a relativisation of marriage as the normative lifestyle:

- The Bible witnesses to many variations of violence in patriarchal households.
- Jesus, Paul, and some early Christian women lived celibate lives.
- The abandonment of the patriarchal household was one of the early characteristics of the Jesus movement and of emerging Christianity.

The results of socio-scientific analyses and the available social, scientific, and biblical evidence have consequences for the feminist theological critique.

Overcoming violence — not only in the case of marriage and the family, but also with respect to other economic and political challenges — demands the "critique of images." Women and men should not be determined by supposedly natural social or economic roles and ethical norms. Stated positively, it is a matter of affirming people's subjectivity and the acceptance of a variety of lifestyles which are free of violence.

Ecclesiology and eschatology

Feminist theology understands itself as a movement that is critical of the Church and that always seeks alternative forms of community. These forms are established in pockets of freedom within ecclesial structures or in autonomous forms of organisations. The model of the "women's church," which is based on experiments such as those of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, means the creation of a new polis (Ecclesia, Qahal, and Synagogue: assembly). Such experiments are a contemporary reaction to the message of the present, eschatological reign of God.

It cannot be emphasised enough that this model is not to be understood as exclusively feminine, homogeneous, or harmonious. On the contrary, the "community of equals" is a political concept that is conscious of the differences that exist in coming together and that requires the ability to handle conflict. One weakness in the concept is that it does not protect against an erroneous identification of "church" and of the "kingdom of God." It is therefore important to underscore the character of the lived vision of a women's church as public and political, as secular and intercultural; and simultaneously to remember the promises of the biblical kingdom of God. These ideas herald a transformation of the world and do not constitute an instance of religious mediation.

Mission

Feminist theology understands women's history as salvation history with the same dignity and relevance as the salvation history of men. A theology of feminist mission as an alternative to the history of the violence of colonialism and imperialism and the historical paternalism of mission requires a paradigm shift: receiving, not sending, becomes the primary mission experience. Therefore, feminist theology gives attention to the promise of salvation history of conception (Hannah, Elizabeth, Mary), and giving birth itself is seen as an expression of the advent of the new creation (Rom 8). These unmistakably feminine experiences are metaphors for the efficaciousness of God's mission. Recourse here to feminine biology in no way envisions a new order of creation. Yet this connection with specifically feminine experiences does indeed break away from the misogynistic tradition in the teachings on creation and original sin.

By emphasising the primacy of conception, feminist theology provides another basic attitude that can serve mission theology without gender differentiation: hearing, listening, being dependent on one another. The commitment to the *Missio Dei*, which unfortunately was often understood clerically and patriarchally or was misused, can "function" in this way. Receiving, not sending is the first action of missiological communication from the human point of view (we have no divine view!). It asks for a human response to God's call (Jn 20:21ff).

Conclusion

How do "receiving the Word of God" and the experience of violence relate to each other? The base community praxis of Pastor Fonseca in Costa Rica shows that without becoming aware of the pain which causes violence, it is arguably impossible to even begin to come to terms with the pain. The indignation and outcry against violence is already a miracle of faith, which rejects injustice and violence.

Overcoming violence is a lofty goal which ecumenical theology has to strive for anew in today's world. Much might be achieved by acknowledging the praxis of that pastor in Costa Rica, and paying heed to the developments in feminist theology. In so doing, violence and its effects would be understood better, the perspective of victims shared, and their right to protest against it affirmed. (BAA)

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Marcia Moya R. *

La mujeres y sus experiencia de Dios

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Introducción: feminización del consumismo

En nuestros días, la globalización y el mercado de dioses, dificultan el análisis crítico y la creación de una conciencia que vaya en coherencia con las necesidades más básicas de la humanidad. Al parecer, cada vez más, el mercado fulmina las miradas y se apropia de las emociones tratando de reemplazarlas con espejismos que se desvanecen cuando se intenta tocarlos.

El caminar por las grandes ciudades, donde las aglutinaciones humanas dejan poco espacio para respirar, y sin embargo acentúan el individualismo debido a la invasión de un mercado donde se compra el amor, la felicidad y la paz, no hay espacio ni para el re-encuentro ni para repensar en lo que nos está sucediendo. El bullicio abrumador y el bombardeo de los medios de comunicación con sus programas educativos nos enseñan cómo debe ser una buena cliente. Una buena parte de las mujeres van adiestrándose para entrar a ser parte de una cultura de consumo, donde ser persona es vestir una marca, utilizar determinados estilos, exhibirse ante los conocidos y desconocidos como si todos formaran parte de una pasarela.

La brecha entre ricos y pobres es cada vez mayor, y eso se debe al gran imperio capitalista que afecta directamente a las mujeres; Incluso entre las mismas mujeres, existen diferencias en cuanto a las condiciones de vida y al acceso a las oportunidades entre aquellas llamadas del primer y del tercer mundo respectivamente. En los últimos años hemos escuchado discursos en los que se toleran las diversidades sexuales y raciales, pero a la hora de ejercer la justicia y la igualdad, el discurso está solapado por las manías tradicionales del poder. Esta sociedad sexista no supera las diferencias de género, y sigue marcando a las mujeres como los mayores sujetos de consumo y para el consumo.

En la política laboral, las mujeres son mal pagadas aunque juegan un papel muy activo. El estereotipo de la mujer de décadas atrás, que era solo una ama de casa ha dado lugar al de una mujer socialmente productiva, que debe utilizar lo que el mercado le ofrece para verse como una competidora eficaz dentro del mercado laboral. Sin embargo, la "mujer social" no ha dejado de ser al mismo tiempo ama de casa. Por lo tanto, la predisposición del grupo femenino por el consumo se ha multiplicado: entre los avatares de una vida que jalonea para todas partes, en el juego de consumir y dejarse consumir se les va quitando el espíritu de ser ellas mismas.

La interiorización de imágenes

Pero antes de que existiera la globalización como un término del mercado internacional, existía ya la difusión de imágenes sagradas. Ella es tan antigua como la memoria histórica pueda recordar. Y una de las imágenes más difundidas e interiorizadas por los y las creyentes ha sido la de un "dios padre". Ante la crítica creciente de mujeres que despiertan con una mayor conciencia de análisis y reflexión, y que cuestionan a la cultura patriarcal por colocar a Dios como padre, se ha comenzado a nombrar un Dios padre y madre. Si bien se intenta así llenar el vacío de un rostro femenino de Dios, se trata nuevamente de una ubicación de roles familiares y sociales de complementariedad y no de unicidad. Una vez más se queda en una imagen que no es trascendental en la experiencia de lo Sagrado.

Los ritos, las oraciones y el modo de relación con Dios también son una construcción, hecha por las religiones patriarcales, para poder ejercer las leyes morales que en especial

caen sobre el cuerpo de las mujeres y sus modos de comportamiento socio-religioso. La culpa ha sido interiorizada eficazmente como un medio de control para que toda aquella que se sale de la norma moral se sienta culpable. Es cuestionable el modo como las mujeres trabajan dentro de la iglesia : no son parte del grupo que toma las decisiones, sino que realizan labores que han sido feminizadas, como el trabajo de las pastorales asistenciales, la catequesis y las labores de limpieza. En la actualidad surge la necesidad de replantear los códigos ético-morales. Es un desafío para las mismas mujeres el tratar de ver el mundo de un modo diferente sin el paradigma masculino, sino con otros paradigmas incluyentes.

Pertenecemos a una cultura masculinizante, donde todo concepto debe pasar por el ojo ya previsto del hombre. No hay conceptos que nos revelen una imparcialidad ante los hombres y las mujeres. Hay mas bien un predominio de los primeros, justificado a través de mitos, leyendas e interpretaciones fuera de contexto de los textos, incluidos los sagrados, y de interpretaciones que justifican los siglos de exclusión y marginación de la mitad de la humanidad. Pero sucede también, que hay mujeres que piensan que el invertir sus roles y ocupar los espacios de los hombres es todo lo que se necesita para la reivindicación de sus derechos. Así, se vuelven a entrapar en el lenguaje masculino y en el modo de ejercer el poder; Como resultado ellas siguen pensando y actuando masculinamente.

Toda construcción responde a un momento determinado de la historia. Por eso, ubicar a Dios como un padre, dejaría sin sentido de lo sagrado a hijos e hijas cuyas vidas están siendo acompañadas solo por la madre. En nuestros días, las estadísticas anuales anotan una gran cantidad de mujeres jefas de familias. Y quizás para la gran mayoría de hijos e hijas de madres solas, la imagen del padre solo sea un recuerdo de violencia. El querer complementar con un Dios madre, lo coloca en un rol familiar, y no en realidad en lo que para los hijos/as de madres solas representa realmente su madre; Es más que un concepto o un rol, se trata de una experiencia *fundante* para sus vidas. A lo que no queremos llegar nuevamente, es a determinar lo sagrado como un rol socio-familiar. Creo que los roles establecidos no expresan la experiencia trascendental de las personas.

Se ha escrito sobre el Dios de los oprimidos, pero no se ha hecho hincapié o referencia directa al Dios de las oprimidas. Esto deja un vacío incluso en el discurso teórico y una mayor invisibilidad a las experiencias de las mujeres en torno a lo sagrado. Como en otros discursos disciplinarios, a las mujeres se les ha considerado solo como objetos pasivos que receptan lo que les toque a buen entender dentro del lenguaje androcéntrico. Al decir "oprimidos" rápidamente se piensa en los hombres, pero no se va directamente a las mujeres. Es preciso diferenciar que al pertenecer al grupo de oprimidos, pueden existir elementos similares de opresión tanto para los hombres como para las mujeres, pero que siempre la opresión femenina es mayor, porque no solo implica la falta de oportunidades socio-políticas, sino que incluye hasta el abuso de sus propios cuerpos. Por eso, hacer un discurso sobre el Dios de los oprimidos no abarca a todos si no se especifican las opresiones de las mujeres.

Tampoco es suficiente crear una imagen de un Dios de las víctimas, mientras los victimarios siguen maltratando a las mujeres con: la violación sexual, el incesto, el acoso sexual, la maternidad precoz, la falta de seguros de salud, la mano de obra barata, etc.; No se puede seguir escribiendo la historia de las mujeres vistas únicamente como víctimas, sino como protagonistas que gozan de sus derechos como ciudadanas plenas. Las imágenes de Dios no pueden ser creadas para justificar las situaciones de injusticia que hay en la sociedad. Eso se llama manipulación y alienación en nombre de Dios.

Tocando las fibras de la espiritualidad de las mujeres

Para las mujeres ha sido un largo camino el de re-descubrirse seres espirituales. La influencia filosófica platónica y aristotélica, etc., consideró siempre a las mujeres como poseedoras de un cuerpo y no de un espíritu; Ésta era una concepción también de los conquistadores para justificar los despojos a los conquistado : entre las descripciones que justificaban la explotación hasta la muerte, alegaban que carecían del espíritu o de la religión verdadera. La educación bajo la moral conservadora de la Iglesia para el proceder de las mismas, fue mutilando y devaluando la capacidad de vivenciar y expresarse en torno a lo sagrado. El hecho de ubicar a las mujeres dentro de la escala de la minoría, aunque sean mayoría numéricamente, siempre jugó un papel psicológico : desmotivarlas y negarles así la fuerza de sentirse mayoría que puede exigir sus

derechos. La educación religiosa se fundamenta básicamente en la repetición de lo establecido: las mujeres repiten los ritos litúrgicos sin participación ni aportación en la estructura de los mismos, corean canciones donde las mujeres están invisibilizadas por el lenguaje androcéntrico y participan de las celebraciones religiosas cumpliendo el calendario litúrgico.

Pero al hacer un análisis desde los márgenes, las mujeres en sus diferentes contextos se manifiestan con sus espiritualidades. Estas mismas espiritualidades van integradas por los símbolos que las mujeres guardan en su memoria conciente o inconcientemente, tanto cultural como simbólicamente femeninas, y que recrean las imágenes de lo sagrado. "Sagrado" es un término que resuelve temporalmente la reflexión a la que se puede aplicar la transversalidad de un análisis que contempla la raza, la situación geográfica, la etnia, el sexo, la cultura, etc. Sabemos, sin embargo, que las personas son diferentes, y la manifestación del espíritu se da en esas diferencias. Es preciso utilizar el plural y hablar de "espiritualidades" que tienen relación con el contexto y la localización geográfica de las personas.

Describir sus experiencias de lo sagrado es ir creando una teología contextualizada aportada por las experiencias de lo divino que se plasma en las prácticas de las mujeres. Ellas son diversas, como diversas son sus maneras de experimentar a Dios. Toda experiencia está dada en un sincretismo tanto cultural como religioso que les lleva a formar en sus imaginarios de vida lo que Dios hace en cada una. Al recrear lo sagrado, ellas lo hacen con místicas propias, con elementos que reinventan y que asocian desde sus propias realidades. En los libros sagrados, como la Biblia, los textos no son concretos al momento de enunciar cómo las mujeres estaban asociadas directamente con lo sagrado. Es solo al realizar una lectura minuciosa de los personajes femeninos, que nos damos cuenta de que las mujeres, y cada una de ellas, tienen sus particularidades. Cada una expresa su propia manera de experimentar y de vivir lo sagrado. Es clara la diferencia en los contextos y en los tiempos, pero hay una manera clave de comprensión y de apropiación en el momento de unir la oración con la acción y la interrelación con Dios es directa.

En las culturas milenarias, al expresar por medio de símbolos la imagen de Dios, lo han acercado al grupo, al medio de convivencia, lo han llamado "Dios de la tienda", "el espíritu que quema", "el camino", "el pozo de agua" — como el símbolo que calma la sed, que es abundante y que proporciona la vida sin demasiada ostentación sino con la simplicidad de la naturaleza. En las culturas ancestrales de América, la imagen de lo sagrado está asociada a la naturaleza; es lo que se percibe en el sincretismo religioso y en las prácticas de la religiosidad popular. También se diría que los símbolos con los que se relaciona lo sagrado, son una manera de no dejar morir sus memorias, como parte de la vida presente que se forma de un pasado y un futuro. Para muchas culturas, lo sagrado les reivindica, les asocia, les hace pueblo, les da identidad, les hace perdurables: perder lo sagrado y su modo de celebrarlo significaría perder el sentido del ser. Y eso nos lleva a pensar que lo sagrado es un sentir indescriptible, pero al mismo tiempo, la fuerza que provee la vida. Quizás por eso lo más cercano a Dios sea decir "soplo de vida".

Pensar que redescubrimos los misticismos de las mujeres ahora, es no reconocer el gran camino de siglos recorridos por las predecesoras. Si solo tomamos el ejemplo de las mujeres Beguinas de la época medieval, encontramos a Margarita Porete, autora de *"El Espejo de las Almas Simples"*, escrito por el cual fue quemada en 1310. En esta obra trata de expresar su comprensión y experiencia de Dios, como una mujer laica pero consagrada al servicio de los más necesitados de la época y de su lugar; Al mismo tiempo, expresa la relación con su imagen sagrada en el éxtasis de su realización, como mujer y como persona que no necesita intermediación, sino una relación que va desde la comprensión, la oración y la práctica entre los/as semejantes.

Por eso quiero resaltar que el camino histórico femenino y sus reflexiones teológicas están siendo redescubiertos. Ellos sirven para que las nuevas generaciones tengan un hilo conductor y para demostrar que las mujeres podemos describir con un universo de palabras lo que significa la vivencia divina. Lo que equivale a decir "hacer teología con lenguaje propio".

Lo sagrado se revela entre nosotras, al descifrar que "no es algo estático, algo absolutista", sino al contrario, es algo que se encuentra en continuo movimiento, algo que se diversifica permanentemente. La experiencia de Dios está cargada de simplicidad, profundidad y amplitud: es lo que lleva a lo trascendente, donde se supera el dolor, el sufrimiento, la ira, la frustración, la pobreza, donde no se limita a un pensamiento único, ni al individualismo; Es como esa energía que ayuda o que está en permanente presencia y supera la soledad que trae angustia, cansancio, pereza, lágrimas; Tiene que ver con la revelación de la justicia, con el vencimiento de los temores, con la renuncia a las violencias; Es el camino que nos conduce a la paz, nos alimenta y nos llena de ternura, nos permite abrazarnos y soñar sin decir que son solo sueños, sino más bien impulsos para el mañana. Tratar de escribir la revelación es solo un modo de volver a sentir lo que

en la interioridad permanece.

Por el modo de manifestar la experiencia de Dios, a muchas mujeres les llamaron místicas, como a Teresa de Ávila, a Sor Juana de la Cruz. Ellas manifestaron sus apasionamientos en el sentir dinámico del espíritu con ardor extremo hasta el éxtasis. Por eso, el aferrarse a sus creencias, a su fe, a su modo de sentir la revelación de Dios en sus vidas, les hizo entusiasmarse y verbalizar de tal manera que siguen inspirando a otras generaciones, sin dejarse morir en la memoria histórica.

El testimonio de la revelación de lo sagrado tiene mucho que ver con los modos de relacionarse sin querer poner al centro de la creación al ser humano, sino como una dinámica de interrelación. Entonces, las personas asocian a Dios como una manifestación en la otra persona, cuando nace un tipo de relación que supera la amistad política y la afectiva, que puede generar estados de dependencia. Hay una experiencia de compensación de la esperanza que se mantiene al buscar una relación incondicional. Ella no se limita solo al dar y al recibir, sino que acompaña en todos los sentidos de la vida. El resultado es un estado de equilibrio y de armonía siendo una parte del todo y siendo el todo a la vez, sin condicionamientos que ofusquen en el vivenciar las sensaciones de libertad; Es allí, donde todo está integrado, que se dan la unicidad y la experiencia de plenitud a la que muchas/os llaman, por darle un nombre, "Dios".

En el camino de búsqueda que emprende cada mujer, ella va sintiendo la necesidad de re-encontrarse consigo misma, con sus diferentes y sus iguales. Siente la necesidad de transformar lo que limita, lo que no permite, todo lo que no concibe que sea Dios. Si consideramos el quehacer de las mujeres empobrecidas como resultado de una sociedad masculina afianzada en el poder, el sexismo y la violencia, podemos decir que es realmente milagroso ver la perseverancia, la esperanza dinámica y la mirada puesta en el futuro. Es como el cumplimiento de las bienaventuranzas, lo que ellas llamarían "haber saboreado la felicidad". Siento incluso que sus espíritus son insondables en lo profundo, en sus arraigos y en sus corajes ante un mundo que insiste en negarse a ser más igualitario.

Acceder a la experiencia de las mujeres como fuente de Sabiduría

En este siglo, el movimiento de las mujeres toma una gran importancia por saberse una nueva forma de concebir la vida y el mundo mismo. El valor de la diversidad de sus experiencias constituye la Sabiduría permanente con la que cuentan los pueblos. Así las mujeres en sus tomas de conciencias liberadoras y transformadoras, se asemejan al *Goel* bíblico (Rescatador - rescatadoras). Ellas son las que rescatan, las que siempre en medio del silencio abrazan sus propias estrategias de sobrevivencia y anudan en su contorno las posibilidades de superar todo lo que parece irreconciliable. Al ser rescatadoras, las mujeres conectan continuamente el "soplo de vida" a lo que parece extenuarse.

Ya que no se puede hablar solo de una reconciliación para solucionar los conflictos reales que existen, hay que apropiarse con vehemencia de las causas, ser en sí la transformación, ser la solución misma. Es apremiante crear alternativas increadas; hay que despejar las mentes y aceptar que a la humanidad hay que recrearla, para que pueda sentir el desborde de sus propias habilidades. Hay que integrar el lenguaje de las mujeres al lenguaje universal, para entender que la experiencia de Dios en las mujeres es un lenguaje que solo el cuerpo procura, porque el discurso no nos basta. Es inexcusable la práctica para entender la

Algo...

**Quisiera que usted tenga razón
De pensar que enloquecí
Que estuve vagando por allí
Perdida fuera de mi mente
Y confundida dentro de mi cuerpo
¿Por qué yo?
Sentí sensaciones inacabables
Que casi no pude comprender
Porque mientras sentía, veía
Y mi mano tecleaba sin sentido
Mientras respiraba moría**

Sin sentir ahogo

**De repente me di cuenta
Que había luz sobre mis ojos
Y miles de sabores en mi boca
Que no sabían a nada,
Pero presiento que me quedé
Llena de todo, ¿sabe?
De todo que es nada.
Luego de tanto tiempo
Fui a comer
Y no tenía afán...**

Sabine Demel

Unloved Children of God?

Women in the Catholic Church

For the Church to be the sacrament of salvation for the world (LG, 1, 9, 48, 59), its central task, says Sabine Demel, must be to set an example that the Church is a place where men and women live and work in mutuality and partnership. Because men and women are created in God's image, women, as well as men, must be represented at all levels of the Church's life and Ministry.

There was a time in the Church when women were considered unclean after childbirth, when cloistered women in a church or chapel had to sing where they could not be seen, when women were prohibited from any kind of ministry. In such times women must have felt — whether they were seen that way or not — that they were unloved children of God. And how do they feel today? Certainly some things have changed, but there are still many women in the Church who feel unloved.

What does the Bible have to say about women in the Church and community? It says a lot. According to Luke,

soon afterwards [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others who provided for him out of their resources (8:1-3).

Is Luke's report historically probable? Did women accompany Jesus in his travels through Galilee? The answer is yes. Exegesis provides an important argument for Luke's description, which is supported also by Mk 15:40 and Mt 27:55f. Why, however, are only three women named? The reason probably lies in the fact that these three "were of high standing in the first community and that their association with Jesus was during his lifetime" (K. H. Rengstorf).

Finally, what is meant by the statement that the women provided for and supported Jesus and his disciples out of their resources? Were the women simply quiet sympathizers who supported Jesus only in the *external things* of day-to-day existence, above all financially, but were uninvolved in his mission of proclamation?

Two things speak against this notion. First, the community of Jesus with the Twelve and with the women is not described merely in external terms, but in terms of a particular community imprinted by mutual and personal support. This is clear from the statement in the original Greek text that the Twelve and a few women *accompanied him*. Literally translated, the text means "and the Twelve *with him*, and a few women." The formulation "with him" shows a close, not a loose devotion and following. This close relationship, furthermore, is said not only of the Twelve, but also of the women who, through the connective article "and," are included in the statement: "the Twelve were with him, *and* a few women."

Second, the word that is translated "provided" (*diakonein*) is not to be understood here in the literal sense of "waiting at tables" or serving meals, but rather in the same sense as it is used in other NT texts — as a description for the "concrete following of Jesus and activity on behalf of the Gospel" (H. Steichele). Consequently, the "provision," the "support" that the women offer is "to be thought of in terms of a basic dimension of life instead of a very specific kind of ministry" (W. Kirschläger). Women therefore were followers of Jesus in a way similar to, though not the same as, the Twelve, and they shared in Jesus' teaching and proclamation as well.

The early Church

The text from Lk 8:1-3 mirrors many other examples throughout the gospels, where Jesus' association with women is open, non-judgmental, and free — and in a patriarchal society no less. In Jesus' teachings we do not find any special instructions given to women on how they are to conduct themselves or on what they are allowed to do. Nothing from Jesus' mouth establishes a *principle* that says "women are excluded from tasks that are entrusted to men" (J. Leenhardt and F. Blanke). In fact, not one negative word is said about women in the entire gospel tradition.

The decisive motive for Jesus' absolutely new relationship to women was based not on "feminism in the sense of a modern liberation movement" (R. Laurentin), but on Jesus' basic understanding of the kingdom of God. Jesus knew that he was sent to the oppressed and outsiders (cf. Mk 1:32; Mt 11:28; Lk 6:20f). Consequently, he was an advocate for women who experienced social and moral discrimination and were marginalized. He proclaimed to them in word and deed that they too were beloved children of God. Without distinguishing them from men, Jesus also called women to "hear his word and to receive the gifts of the kingdom" (R. Laurentin). He helped women to gain self-respect and to "fully realize their Christian personalities" (J. Blank) as beloved children of God.

The early Christian community obviously understood Jesus' new message concerning women, and this message had consequences for the building up of that community. Numerous places in the NT show that women had important tasks in the life of the community. Women interpreted God's word (cf. Priscilla, Acts 18:26), were leaders of early Christian house churches (cf. Prisca, I Cor 16:19), enjoyed positions of leadership in Christian communities (cf. Phoebe, Rom 16:1), and were co-workers in mission (cf. Mary, Persis, and Evodia: Rom 16:6, 12; Phil 4:20). Women in early Christian communities had social and religious equality. Such equality was revolutionary given the patriarchalism of Jewish praxis, and the fact that women at the time were limited to being housewives and mothers, and were not active participants in cultic gatherings.

Nevertheless, equality did not last. Already, toward the end of the first century, women were being displaced from their positions of equality. This development may have occurred because

on one hand, immediately after Jesus' death the Christian community involuntarily had to accommodate the Jewish-Hellenistic environment and its patriarchal structures. On the other, the Church understood itself as a "large house" which conducted itself in the manner of an ancient household, where the husband was the "lord of the house" (*oikodespotes*) and the wife was subordinate to him. Furthermore, early Christian communities had to combat false teaching, above all, Gnosticism. Gnosticism was very oriented toward the emancipation of women. Women functioned widely as teachers in Gnostic circles, and soon the public activity of women in Christian communities was considered heresy (H. Steichele).

The first witnesses to this development are found already in the NT, where a variety of texts encourage women's silence in the Church (I Cor 14:33b-36; cf. I Tm 2:11-15; I Pt 3:1-3).

Spousal obedience

Over time, women were excluded from public activity in the Church. They were no longer seen as beloved children of God but as obedient spouses and joyful child bearers:

Some ... do not scruple to do away with the honorable and trusting obedience which the woman owes to the man. Many of them even go further and assert that such a subjection of one party to the other is unworthy of human dignity, that the rights of the husband and wife are equal.... This, however, is not the true emancipation of woman, nor that rational and exalted liberty which belongs to the noble office of a Christian woman and wife; it is rather the debasing of the womanly character and the dignity of motherhood, and indeed of the whole family.... More than this, this false liberty and unnatural equality with the husband is to the detriment of the woman herself.

(Pius XII, *Casti Connubii*, 74-75)

That view was not unique; rather, it realistically mirrored how the Church saw things in 1930. In the 1917 Code of Canon Law, many rules discriminated against and degraded women. For

example, in normal situations women were not to serve at Mass. They could do so only in extraordinary situations, and then at a distance. In no way was the woman to approach the altar (c. 813.2). Even more inimical to women, almost grotesque, was the rule that religious women, if they sang in a church or chapel, had to do so in a place where they could not be seen (c. 1264.2). Only men could assist the bishop as trustees (c. 1520.1; 1521.1), and only a man could be the actor for the process of beatification or sainthood (c. 2004.1). One is inclined to cap off these examples from the 1917 Code by referring to c. 986.1, which says that women are excluded from receiving sacred ordination. However, this legal stipulation is connected to dogmatic theological considerations, as discussed below.

A change in the Church's view of women began with Pope John XXIII in 1963 (*Pacem in terris*). No longer were women seen as subordinate to men, nor was motherhood their only vocation. Rather, John XXIII stressed the dignity of the human person and the fact that women had the same rights in both the private and public spheres. This acknowledgement of equal rights and value for both women and men was adopted by Vatican II in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*:

All human beings are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God's image; they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all human beings, and it must be given ever greater recognition....

But forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design. It is regrettable that these basic personal rights are not yet being respected everywhere, as is the case with women who are denied the chance freely to choose a husband, or a state of life, or to have access to the same educational and cultural benefits as are available to men. (29)

And in the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People* the Council stated that:

Since in our days women are taking an increasingly active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that their participation in the various sectors of the Church's apostolate should likewise develop. (9)

This new attitude of the Council was also reflected in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, which considered women in every respect to be fundamentally equal with men. This is clear from both catalogues concerning the responsibilities and rights of believers and the laity (cc. 208-31). There is, with one exception (c. 230, on lectors and acolytes), to be no discrimination between men and women:

In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function (c. 208).

Each and every believer also has the right to be involved in the Church's mission and to exercise the apostolate "in accord with each one's own condition and function." This formulation is meant to distinguish between clergy, religious and laity (c. 207), but not between specific differences in men and women. The 1983 Code no longer distinguishes which of the Church's ministries and offices the laity can assume on the basis of male or female. Thus, theoretically, the equality of women is guaranteed. In practice however, this fact has not become particularly noticeable. Now, as before, women are under-represented in positions of Church leadership. It will take much common effort to truly overcome the centuries-long suppression of women in and by the Church.

Ordination of women

Many see the fact that women are still excluded from ordination to the priesthood as proof that the equality of women in the Catholic Church receives lip service, but that in reality women are not counted as beloved children of God. The pivotal point is that according to c. 1024, "Only a baptized male validly receives sacred ordination." Not infrequently, the normative notion "invalid" is tempered to mean "illicit," which would mean that the ordination of a woman is forbidden but nevertheless valid. On the other hand, the statement is often made out to be

a “divine instruction” or “law,” whereby any change to this law is seen as out of the question because it would contradict divine will, for which the Church is responsible. However, in the legal determination concerning the non-admission of women to the priesthood, there is no reference to a divine law or instruction.

Magisterial teaching

Canon law is as good or bad, as restrictive or open, as its underlying theology. Canon law does not belong to the realm of deep theology, but rather expresses the theological convictions of the Church’s highest teaching office. What are the reasons for the non-admission of women to sacred ordination? Here we need to distinguish between three forms of ordination — to the diaconate, to the priesthood, and to the office of bishop.

(1) The reason women are not allowed to be ordained as a bishop has not been asked. Nor has the magisterium further clarified the issue.

(2) Whether women can be ordained to the diaconate has long been discussed. Already in early Church history, there were phases and regions in which there existed a female diaconate. Vatican II (1962-1965) reintroduced the permanent diaconate for men, and the reasons for doing so are valid too for many women in the Church: women serve in functions which are characteristic of the diaconate’s service to Jesus Christ and the Church; they accept and even manage various ministries in the Church’s charitable activities; they dispense the Eucharist, proclaim God’s word, and lead worship and the prayers of the faithful. The Church’s magisterium has not taken up this discussion, and the question of a female diaconate is still open.

(3) By contrast, many magisterial documents have clearly rejected the ordination of women to the priesthood. Key statements on this exclusivity do not devalue women or say that they are not beloved children of God. The issue, rather, is the unchanging identity of priestly ordination. The sacramental presence of Jesus Christ through the ordained priest is bound to the male gender.

Already in 1976 the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared that the Church “in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination” (29). This fidelity to the Lord is based on firstly the conduct of Jesus Christ, who called only men into the circle of the Twelve and appointed them apostles; secondly, the apostles choosing only men as their successors; thirdly, this practice being fundamental to tradition; and fourthly, it having endured as Church practice. This tradition, established by Jesus Christ, gained special authority in the fact that Jesus himself had probably instituted women in other roles, and this entirely against the tenor of his times. Thus, behind the Church’s praxis to admit only men to the priesthood stands not only the socio-cultural situation of that time but also, and above all, a positive act of Jesus’ volition, which is historically and socially independent and which stands for all time. The fundamental basis for this teaching is given in symbolic analogy:

The whole sacramental economy is in fact based upon natural signs, on symbols imprinted upon the human psychology: “Sacramental signs,” says Saint Thomas, “represent what they signify by natural resemblance.” The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things: when Christ’s role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this “natural resemblance” which exists between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man. (*Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, 5)

Behind this statement are the symbols of the bride and the bridegroom. The relationship of the (male) office-bearer to his community is seen in terms of the bridegroom and head — Christ — to his bride, the Church. And this relationship is understood in a sacramental way — the image designates that which is effected. In other words, only a *male can express the sacramental sign of the relationship of Christ to the Church* as its bridegroom or husband. It is not simply that *the personal sexuality of Jesus is represented*, but that *with that sexuality the relationship of the sexes to one another is symbolized*. And this relationship is unalterable, just as only a man can be a father and a woman a mother. This theological reasoning by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1976 was reinforced by Pope John Paul II in 1994, when he declared that “the Church has no authority whatsoever

to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful" (*On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone*, 4).

Perspectives

This present state of the law and teaching in the Catholic Church regarding the ordination of women to the priesthood is to be acknowledged and held by all. At the same time, however, the search for the truth must continue because the truth is always greater than the language that expresses it. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the task of constantly searching for the truth belongs to all members of the Church, but especially to theologians. In a loyal and scholarly way, they are to edify the Church so that the truth entrusted to the Church is always more deeply sought and scientifically argued and proclaimed. In keeping with this task, scholarship since the 1960s has had an intense discussion about why women cannot be admitted to the ministerial priesthood. We note some thoughts and questions that have emerged from this discussion.

(1) A first consideration concerns the circle of the Twelve. The call of the apostles did not revolve around the question of male and female, but around the significance of a symbolic drawing from the twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve men that Jesus chose stood for the twelve tribes of the renewed Israel: "This *prophetic sign* could, of course, be best symbolized by *twelve Jewish men* (and not by a random number of Jews and Samaritans or of women and men)" (M. Kehl).

Nevertheless, this symbolism soon lost its role because two of the three characteristics no longer stood. The number of apostles did not remain at twelve, and non-Jews became apostles. This raises the question about why the Church holds doggedly to the third characteristic, gender, when considering the ministry of the "Twelve" (apostles). Could the reason be that the NT itself provides no specific citations that speak about prohibiting women from holding public office, or that Jesus himself gave no special instructions on the matter? And is it not worth noting that society became less patriarchal and more firmly based on a partnership between men and women?

(2) And what of the equation consisting of *the Twelve*, *the Apostles*, and *priests*? First, the circle of apostles was larger than the circle of the Twelve, and second, it was not priests but bishops who were the successors of the apostles.

In the Declaration (*Inter insigniores*) the transference of the idea of the apostles and the Twelve to the idea of priests (and bishops) (is) too simple. It is as though we had sufficient knowledge of how the early Church developed in its structure and organization. The fact that such knowledge is hard to come by raises the question of whether Jesus' choice of twelve men is the norm for congregational leaders and overseers of the Eucharistic celebration in communities of later times. (K. Rahner)

(3) Connecting the symbolic analogy of faith with the nuptial imagery raises questions. *Firstly*, the Church is not only seen as a bride, but also as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The bridegroom-bride imagery is only one image among many. The NT does not place a "monopoly on the bridegroom-bride symbolism" (W. Beinert).

Secondly, one needs to consider the origin and content of the bride of God (Christ) imagery. In the OT, as well as in the NT, the image describes God's people as Yahweh's bride (with Christ as bridegroom). Basically, the bridegroom-bride metaphor concerns a relationship of superiority (bridegroom) and inferiority (bride). The bridegroom is the one who actively chooses, and the bride is the passively chosen one. This unequal relationship between the bridegroom and the bride has little currency today and is no longer part of Church teaching. The metaphor itself is a very conditioned expression for the unconditional superior relationship of Christ to the community.

In order for the bridegroom-bride metaphor to image the relationship of God (Christ) to the Church, it must be maintained that the woman, by her very nature, is subordinate to the man. Thus, only a man, Christ, can sacramentally represent the head of the woman (community). What this means in clear terms is that only by reference to the woman's

subordination to man *by her very nature* can it be *theologically* maintained that the woman, in every instance, is subordinated in every community to her Lord and head, Jesus Christ. The "bride" can be represented, but at no time can the bride in any way be superior to the bridegroom and Lord, Jesus Christ. (J. Werbick)

Thirdly, nowhere in the NT is Jesus' "maleness" a theological basis for his being the head of his body or the bridegroom of his bride, the Church. Instead, the basis for being head and bridegroom is solely Jesus' act of redemption. This redemptive act is not grounded in Jesus' *maleness* but in his loving surrender on humanity's behalf. It is not Jesus' maleness but Christ's redemptive role as the head of his Church that is the decisive bearer of ordination. Christ's (priestly) office is not represented on the basis of sex, race, or class, but on the sole basis of *ordination*, through which a human being is called and enabled by God for an ecclesially visible ministry. (M. Kehl)

(4) One must also caution against an overemphasis on the gender of Jesus Christ. What is decisive is not God's *becoming man* in Jesus Christ, but his *becoming human*. This awareness was already present in the early Church. According to the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451),

the Logos did not take on maleness, but human nature as such — *being woman and being man* together.... The Logos did not *descend* into *sarx* (flesh) but *became* "*anthropos*," human, in corporeal, psychic, free, and thoughtful self-responsibility.

Conclusions

(1) Whether the exclusion of women from priestly ordination is to remain normative and not be subject to the historically changing content of tradition is a decision that "is incumbent on the Church itself and is concretized in the ministry of its magisterium" (M. Kehl). It involves the sense of all the Church's faithful and the knowledge of theologians.

Since the sacraments are the same for the universal Church and pertain to the divine deposit, it is for the supreme authority of the Church alone to approve or define those things which are required for their validity ... (c. 841).

Thus, lawful rules and regulations can (fundamentally) change if the theology (fundamentally) changes.

(2) The magisterium is totally and completely in accord with the fact that the Church must be continually faithful to Jesus Christ. It should not be overlooked, however, that the question of how *this faithfulness includes gender in priestly ordination* has not been sufficiently clarified, either by scholarship or by the magisterium, and is thus an open question. According to K. Rahner,

The discussion between the magisterium and scholarship on the (un)changing theological significance of gender in priestly ordination must continue with prudence and mutual respect. The discussion should be critical but avoid misplaced emotionalism, which may be expressly or covertly at work on both sides. Courage for historical change is part of what it means to be faithful, and the Church owes its Lord this faithfulness.

(3) All theological and legal aspects of this issue can be summed up in the following statement:

According to the Pope, *Ordinatio Sacerdotali* is universally binding and is thus to be respected by all bishops and theologians, as well as by all Catholic Christians. However, *Ordinatio Sacerdotali* presents no compelling dogmatic reasons against a later corrective. [History shows us] that this would not be the first time that the Roman magisterium modified something that it considered a binding position. However, because of John Paul II's binding

statement against the ordination of women in *Ordinatio Sacerdotali*, such a corrective would need the entire authority of an Ecumenical Council. (H. Hoping)

Women as beloved children of God

Even today women in the Church face great difficulties and disadvantages that can engender the feeling that they are unloved children of God. It is important therefore, that women bring forth their talents and gifts so that they can share their thinking and feeling and mutually support and encourage one another. They need both to be aware that they are not unloved children of God and to resist any notion that they lack potential. On the other hand, they should not see themselves as the "better half" of humanity or think that they are more loved than men. Women are created in God's image, as are men. Women and men are God's children in equal measure. However, women live out this fact of being in the image of God and of being a child of God differently to men because they "have had different experiences, were socialized differently and have other biographies" (S. Spengel). Nevertheless, men and women created in God's image have equal dignity and are thus equally children of God.

For the Church to be the sacrament of salvation for the world (LG 1, 9, 48, 59), as well as a sign and witness of salvation, its central task must be to show by example that the Church is a place where men and women live and work in mutuality and partnership. In recent years the Church has latched onto the popular economic issue of "surplus value" to curtail women from holding positions of equality. This concept is degrading because it ultimately denies women's equality, or at least does not take that equality seriously. Because men and women are created in God's image, women must be represented at all levels of the Church and there should be no need to justify such representation. Women's place in the Church should be *theologically, not pragmatically, grounded*. What must ultimately be brought to expression is that the Church needs women as equal partners — not because there may otherwise be too few people to carry out the Church's daily tasks and mission — but because having been created as a human being, and therefore in God's image, whether as men or as women, demands it (BAA).

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Peter Hongliang Xing

Leadership des femmes dans la communauté johannique

INTRODUCTION

Une simple lecture cursive du quatrième évangile nous montre que, dans sa vie publique, Jésus est en relation avec des hommes aussi bien qu'avec des femmes. Tous sont appelés à devenir des disciples par leur foi en Jésus, Messie et Sauveur, et à trouver la vie en plénitude grâce à cette foi. Certains ont déjà une relation avec Jésus lorsqu'ils apparaissent dans l'Évangile; d'autres l'auront lors de leur première rencontre avec Lui. Les femmes suivent le même schéma. Il faut se rappeler que le quatrième évangile ne met pas l'accent sur un groupe prééminent, comme celui des Douze. Bien que ceux-ci soient mentionnés, les Douze n'y jouent aucun rôle spécifique. La responsabilité pastorale est confiée à une seule personne, Simon Pierre (*Jn 21*). Toutefois, malgré son mandat de paître les agneaux et les brebis, la tâche de sauvegarder la révélation de Jésus est confiée au disciple bien-aimé, qui ne reçoit aucune responsabilité pastorale. Un examen plus attentif du mandat de Pierre montre que le fondement de tout service envers la communauté se trouve dans un engagement personnel à l'égard de Jésus, qui seul est lumière et vie, voie et vérité (*Jn 14, 6*). Le but précis de cette étude est de répondre à la question suivante: d'après le contexte du quatrième Évangile, que peut-on dire des femmes, de leur rôle et de leur possible *leadership*? Notre recherche portera sur les points suivants:

- a. Jésus est en relation avec des hommes aussi bien qu'avec des femmes. Les hommes et les femmes ont tous accès à sa personne et à sa révélation.
- b. Les hommes et les femmes sont tous appelés à devenir des disciples.
- c. Dans la communauté johannique, des femmes ont la possibilité d'exercer des responsabilités.

a. Jésus est en relation avec des hommes aussi bien qu'avec des femmes

Une lecture très rapide du quatrième évangile le démontre clairement. Jésus rassemble ses premiers disciples: André, un homme qui n'est pas nommé, Simon Pierre, Philippe et Nathanaël (*Jn 1,19*). Ensuite, c'est la mère de Jésus qui prend l'initiative d'attirer l'attention de son Fils sur le manque de vin lors de la fête des noces (*Jn 1,1-11*) et qui lui donne l'occasion d'en fournir en abondance (Les péripécies sur cette relation entre Marie et Jésus seront analysées plus loin; il suffit simplement ici de faire remarquer cette relation). Au chapitre 3, Jésus cherche à expliquer à Nicodème les exigences de la vie éternelle. Au chapitre suivant, Jésus prend l'initiative d'amener la Samaritaine à se demander s'il est le Messie. Dans la dernière partie du chapitre 4, en guérissant le fils de l'officier royal, il le mène à la foi, ainsi que toute sa maisonnée. Ensuite, il guérit physiquement et spirituellement un homme perclus depuis trente-huit ans (*Jn 5*), il guérit et conduit à la foi un homme aveugle de naissance (*Jn 9*). Au chapitre 11 ce sont deux sœurs, Marie et Marthe, qui demandent l'aide de Jésus en faveur de leur frère. Puis il prend l'initiative de conduire Marthe à une plus grande foi en Lui. Ensuite, Marie oint les pieds de Jésus (*Jn 12*) et enfin, Jésus amène Marie de Magdala à croire en sa résurrection et lui confie le mandat de proclamer son triomphe aux disciples (*Jn 20*). Dans chacune de ces rencontres, une femme est appelée à faire un pas de plus dans sa foi et dans sa relation avec Jésus. La mère de Jésus est appelée à passer du rôle de mère à celui de disciple, la Samaritaine à faire ses premiers pas hésitants dans la foi et à être témoin auprès des gens de son village, Marthe à croire en Jésus présent devant elle et en la résurrection à la fin des temps, Marie de Béthanie à le

rejoindre d'avance dans son heure, Marie de Magdala à reconnaître le Christ ressuscité et à devenir son messager.

b. Des femmes et des hommes sont appelés à devenir des disciples

La définition de la foi johannique donnée par Schnackenburg peut aussi éclairer le sens du mot «disciple» dans le quatrième Evangile. Il décrit la foi comme suit: «elle consiste à recevoir la révélation proclamée par Jésus, à accepter personnellement l'unique Sauveur et sa révélation, à vivre en union avec lui dans une compréhension croissante, une confession ouverte et un amour actif, selon ses commandements et à son exemple».¹ Si l'on considère cette citation comme ayant trait aux disciples de Jésus, tous, dans le quatrième Evangile, qu'ils soient hommes ou femmes, y correspondent, sauf peut-être le disciple bien-aimé. Aucune preuve particulière n'est nécessaire dans le cas des hommes qui, les premiers, commencent à suivre Jésus (*Jn* 1). C'étaient des disciples de Jean: Simon Pierre et Nathanaël l'ont suivi, amenés par André (*Jn* 1,41) et Philippe (*Jn* 1,45). Tout l'évangile décrit leur cheminement de disciples, pas à pas, dans la foi. Bien qu'il soit dit, «ils virent sa gloire et crurent en Lui» (*Jn* 2,11), ce n'est que Simon Pierre qui confesse Jésus comme le Saint de Dieu (*Jn* 6) et Thomas qui, à la fin du chapitre 20, reconnaît Jésus comme son *Sauveur* et son *Dieu* (*Jn* 20,28). Même après la confession de Pierre au nom des Douze (*Jn* 6), un membre de ce groupe trahira Jésus, tandis que Pierre lui-même le reniera trois fois. Enfin, ce n'est que lorsque Pierre affirme qu'il aime vraiment Jésus qu'il reçoit le mandat de paître ses brebis (*Jn* 21,15-19). On devient disciple progressivement. C'est vrai de l'officier royal qui devient croyant avec sa maisonnée après avoir fait confiance en la parole de Jésus (*Jn* 4,50-53). L'aveugle-né insiste sur la guérison que Jésus lui a accordée et arrive finalement à une foi entière lors de sa rencontre personnelle avec lui (*Jn* 9,38). Les deux, l'officier royal et l'aveugle-né, cheminent vers une foi totale et deviennent pleinement disciples. Il n'en va pas autrement quand il s'agit des femmes. Marie, la mère de Jésus, passe de son rôle de mère à celui de disciple. La Samaritaine arrive à se demander sérieusement si cet homme assis au bord du puits ne serait pas le Messie longtemps attendu. Il en est ainsi avec les autres femmes de l'Evangile. Dans la suite de cette étude, nous examinerons davantage en détail si l'on trouve dans le texte une ouverture à un *leadership* possible des femmes dans la communauté johannique.

c. La possibilité donnée aux femmes d'exercer des responsabilités

Une étude des événements qui entourent la vie de Jésus dans les Synoptiques montre qu'il a appelé les Douze, aussi appelés *apôtres*, et qu'il les a envoyés en mission, doués de ses pouvoirs (*Mc* 3,14 sv; 6,7). Parmi les Douze, Jésus en choisit trois comme témoins de manifestations particulières de sa puissance (*Mc* 5,37; 9,2). Dans le quatrième Evangile cependant, le mot *apôtre* n'est jamais utilisé et les Douze ne bénéficient d'aucune autorité particulière. En outre, l'Evangile ne dit rien de précis sur des structures de décision ou des mandats particuliers accordés à la communauté pour laquelle il a été écrit. Bien que Marie-Madeleine et Pierre aient reçu un mandat de la part de Jésus, ils ne sont pas garants de sa révélation. Dans la communauté johannique le garant est le disciple bien-aimé; il n'en a pas reçu le mandat explicite, mais son autorité repose sur l'amour du Seigneur à son égard, et sur son amour pour lui (*Jn* 19,35; 21,24). Dans cette communauté les responsabilités sont fondées sur l'amour de Jésus et le service. Il s'agit d'amener d'autres personnes à Jésus, de les conduire à obéir à sa parole, à accepter sa révélation, à vivre en accord avec celle-ci, à s'engager envers Lui pour la vie et à donner sa vie pour les brebis.

1 LA MÈRE DE JÉSUS (JN 2,1-12; 19,25-27)

1.1. Disciple du début jusqu'à la fin, de Cana jusqu'à la Croix

La première femme rencontrée dans le quatrième Evangile est la mère de Jésus; elle est aussi mentionnée la première dans le récit de Cana. Le fait qu'elle soit mise en vedette laisse supposer qu'elle aurait un rôle important à jouer dans la suite. Comme mère de Jésus, elle n'apparaît pas seulement aux noces de Cana (2,1-21), mais aussi à la crucifixion (19,25-27). C'est la seule personne nommée au début et à la fin du ministère terrestre de

Jésus et ainsi le seul témoin de la première et de la dernière révélation de sa gloire. Son identité repose toujours sur sa relation à Jésus.

1.2. Mère et Fils: devenir disciple en relation avec Jésus

La mère de Jésus, Jésus Lui-même et ses disciples étaient invités au festin de noces à Cana en Galilée (*Jn* 2,1-11). Les versets 3 à 5 sont décisifs pour comprendre non seulement la péricope, mais surtout la relation entre Jésus et sa mère. Au verset 3, elle dit à Jésus, «ils n'ont plus de vin». Notons qu'elle ne pose aucune question,² mais ne fait que constater que la réserve de vin est épuisée. Selon la NIV (Nouvelle Version Internationale), on peut lire, «Chère femme, pourquoi penser que cela me concerne? Mon heure n'est pas encore venue» (2,4).³ Mot à mot, Jésus dit à peu près ceci: «Occupe-toi de tes affaires, femme, mon heure n'est pas encore venue». La réponse de la mère de Jésus nous surprend encore davantage. Elle dit aux serviteurs, «Tout ce qu'il vous dira, faites-le» (2,5). Jésus change alors l'eau en vin et donne à ceux qui participent à la fête un vin excellent en abondance, bien meilleur que celui qui a été épuisé. La question qui se pose est la suivante: que s'est-il passé dans cette conversation — entre le moment de la déclaration d'un manque et l'avis donné aux serviteurs — qui a changé le refus de Jésus en une disponibilité à effectuer un miracle pour les invités? Les mots-clés pour comprendre ce qui n'est pas exprimé est *femme*, *heure*, et *faites tout ce qu'il vous dira*. Sans cesser d'être la mère de Jésus, Marie devient porte-parole des invités à la noce, mieux encore, porte-parole d'Israël qui a besoin d'un Rédempteur.⁴ *Ils n'ont pas de vin* veut dire aussi *nous manquons de vie, de joie*, en bref, *de rédemption*. C'est cela que Jésus semble entendre et il répond que le temps de ce don, de son *heure*, n'est pas encore venue; cependant si Marie elle-même et Israël le suivent fidèlement comme disciples, ils arriveront à cette heure et recevront ce qu'ils veulent vraiment recevoir.⁵ Lorsque la mère de Jésus se tourne vers les serviteurs et leur demande de faire ce que Jésus leur dira, elle montre qu'elle a personnellement commencé à le suivre, en obéissant à sa parole.⁶ La preuve en est lorsque Marie apparaît pour la deuxième fois dans l'Evangile, sous la croix de son Fils, à l'accomplissement de son *heure* (*Jn* 19, 25-27). Comme signe du début de l'ère messianique, du banquet de noces messianique et de la vie en plénitude qui coulera de son cœur percé,⁷ Jésus change l'eau en un vin abondant et excellent.⁸

1.3. La Mère comme disciple fidèle

La seule autre scène où paraît la mère de Jésus se trouve en Jean 19,25-27 et c'est au pied de la croix. Cette scène est étroitement liée aux noces de Cana par les mots-clés, *mère de Jésus* et *femme*. Jésus prend l'initiative de s'adresser à la femme, la première qui apparaît dans le récit, à s'engager sans réserves sur sa parole (cf. 2,35). Il lui dit d'accepter le disciple bien-aimé comme son fils: ensuite, il se tourne vers le disciple bien-aimé et lui ordonne d'accepter sa mère comme la sienne. Cette brève scène se trouve dans un contexte où Jésus abandonne son esprit (*Jn* 19,30) et où le sang et l'eau qui coulent de son côté transpercé (*Jn* 19,34) semblent symboliser la naissance de la communauté chrétienne.⁹ C'est l'heure où Jésus remplit sa mission et retourne au Père. Un disciple, qui n'est pas nommé, et une femme se trouvent debout sous la croix. Leur présence revêt un caractère symbolique ou représentatif, car dans le quatrième Evangile les personnes prennent une signification plus large. C'est également vrai ici. Le disciple bien-aimé est d'abord une personne concrète et la femme est la mère de Jésus. Les deux, comme on vient de le dire, ont une signification symbolique. La femme représente tous les rachetés et peut bien signifier l'*Eglise Mère*.¹⁰ De même, le disciple bien-aimé représente tous les disciples appelés à suivre leur Seigneur dans une obéissance aimante. Le disciple bien-aimé reçoit une nouvelle mère; il est adopté dans une nouvelle famille, celle de Jésus, et devient un frère de Jésus." La femme est confiée aux soins des disciples bien-aimés. Plus important encore, la scène répond à ce que la mère de Jésus souhaite ardemment, lorsqu'elle dit: «ils n'ont plus de vin» (*Jn* 2,3). Ici, au pied de la croix, grâce aux soins du disciple bien-aimé, elle reçoit ce que l'eau changée en vin ne faisait que préfigurer. Elle reçoit non seulement ce qu'elle désirait fondamentalement, mais aussi un rôle nouveau, celui de mère de tous les disciples de Jésus, représentés par le disciple bien-aimé au pied de la croix.¹² Le Commentaire Biblique de Collègeville l'exprime très bien: le quatrième Evangile représenterait Marie au pied de la

croix dans son double rôle:

- a) celui du symbole féminin de l'Eglise mère, qui prend soin des disciples de Jésus et qui est confiée à leurs soins; ils deviennent ses enfants et, en conséquence, les frères et les sœurs de Jésus;
- b) celui de la femme victorieuse, accentuant ainsi une contribution féminine à l'œuvre du salut. Le portrait négatif d'Eva dans la Bible est remplacé par celui de l'Ave qui donne la vie.¹³

1.4. Le leadership: servir avec amour

Avant d'entamer une discussion pour savoir si la mère de Jésus avait une responsabilité de décision dans la communauté johannique, il faut d'abord mettre au clair l'étendue de cette responsabilité. Le *leadership* peut d'abord être considéré comme un service ou un mandat confié à une personne par la communauté; la personne l'exerce parce qu'elle en a reçu la mission, ou parce qu'elle y a été ordonnée par la communauté. Cette responsabilité peut aussi être comprise comme une prise d'initiative en réponse à un besoin, mais sans mandat. Dans ce cas, la personne agit en son nom propre et non en celui de la communauté. Lorsque la Première Lettre à Timothée mentionne les qualifications des évêques et des diacres, il s'agit d'un office ecclésial et d'une fonction officielle de gouvernement. Lorsque Paul envoie ses salutations à de nombreux collaborateurs (*Rm 16*), il se réfère aux personnes qui se dévouent activement à plusieurs services jugés nécessaires; ils sont autorisés à rendre ces services en raison de leurs dons charismatiques plutôt qu'en raison d'un mandat d'Eglise. Dans le quatrième Evangile, toutefois, on ne perçoit pas l'existence d'offices ecclésiaux au sein de la communauté, mais il est facile de constater que des hommes et des femmes répondent à des besoins et à des situations propres au contexte évangélique. Ce qui est clair, c'est que l'amour pour Jésus et l'amour mutuel sont des exigences fondamentales pour assurer un service et assumer des responsabilités.¹⁴ Marie exerce une responsabilité en prenant l'initiative de présenter à son Fils les besoins de la noce (*Jn 2,1-11*). Le verset 5, «Faites tout ce qu'il vous dira», exprime non seulement une certitude inébranlable que son Fils agira malgré un refus évident, mais aussi la conviction que de faire ce qu'il dit, ou, en d'autres mots, de le suivre comme disciple, est la seule manière adéquate d'être en relation avec lui. Dans la péricope des noces de Cana, le rôle de Marie est achevé lorsqu'elle a amené les serviteurs à Jésus, prêts à Lui obéir. En suivant les directives de Jésus, les invités à la noce reçoivent le don d'un vin excellent et abondant.¹⁵

1.5. Résumé de la section

La mère de Jésus commence son itinéraire de disciple aux noces de Cana. Son parcours l'amène jusqu'à la croix de son Fils, et bien qu'elle ne soit pas mentionnée lors de la vie publique de Jésus, elle est présente à la fin, ferme dans une union personnelle avec lui, debout près de lui avec le disciple bien-aimé, alors que la plupart se font remarquer par leur absence.¹⁶

2 LA SAMARITAINE (Jn 4,4-42)

2.1. Une invitation à devenir disciple

Le texte de *Jn 4,4-42* décrit comment la Samaritaine prend peu à peu conscience de la nature de Jésus. La conversation commence par une demande de Jésus, «Donne-moi à boire» (*Jn 4,7*). La Samaritaine ne voit d'abord en lui qu'un Juif (*Jn 4,9*). La conversation continue, et lorsque Jésus dévoile sa connaissance préternaturelle de la vie personnelle de cette femme, elle conclut qu'il est un prophète (*Jn 4,19*). Alors que le dialogue se poursuit, elle commence à se demander si Jésus n'est pas plus qu'un prophète, et lorsqu'elle le mentionne comme Messie, Jésus revendique ce titre ouvertement, «Je le suis, moi qui te parle» (*Jn 4,26*). L'épisode de la Samaritaine se termine par la confession des Samaritains qui croient en Jésus comme sauveur du monde (*Jn 4,42*). Dans le texte qui suit, nous verrons plus en détail la manière dont Jésus conduit la femme à croire en Lui et ainsi à devenir son disciple. Au début du récit, Jésus se trouve seul au puits de Jacob à midi, lorsqu'une Samaritaine arrive pour puiser de l'eau. Jésus lui dit: «Donne-moi à boire». La

femme lui répond ironiquement: «Comment? Toi, un Juif, tu me demandes à boire à moi, une femme samaritaine?». Un commentaire rédactionnel explique alors que les Juifs ne veulent rien avoir de commun avec les Samaritains (*Jn 4,7 sv*).¹⁷ Plutôt que de se laisser écarter par le rejet de sa demande, Jésus éveille l'intérêt de la femme en lui posant une énigme, qui contient une promesse merveilleuse. La femme doit trouver la réponse à deux questions: 1° Connais-tu le don de Dieu? 2° Qui est celui qui demande à boire? Avec une promesse: Il t'aurait donné de l'eau vive (une eau fraîche coulant du puits). La femme est intriguée. Elle a bien conscience que Jésus n'a rien qui lui permette de puiser de l'eau. Elle lui demande alors s'il est plus grand que le Patriarche Jacob qui a donné à ses descendants le puits où ils se trouvent (*Jn 4, 11 sv.*). Jésus explique que l'eau qu'il donnera ôtera toute soif. En fait, l'eau deviendra une source jaillissant en vie éternelle (*Jn 4, 13 sv.*).¹⁸ La femme n'a entendu qu'une chose, que celui qui boira de cette eau n'aura plus jamais soif. Ainsi, elle n'aurait plus à venir puiser de l'eau au puits de Sychar. Elle demande donc de cette eau magique (*Jn 4,15*). Jésus lui dit alors d'appeler son mari et de revenir. Elle admet qu'elle n'a pas de mari. En cela elle dit la vérité, mais pas toute la vérité. Jésus lui révèle qu'il connaît sa situation et qu'elle vit avec quelqu'un qui n'est pas son mari (*Jn 4,17 sv*). C'est alors que la femme confesse Jésus comme prophète (*Jn 4, 19*). Elle semble ne pas se soucier de l'explication de Jésus sur le lieu d'adoration et dit simplement: «Lorsque le Messie viendra, il nous annoncera toutes choses» (*Jn 4,25*). Alors Jésus fait une déclaration tout à fait surprenante et se révèle comme le Messie, «Je le suis, moi qui te parle» (*Jn 4,26*).¹⁹

2.2. Devenir disciple, c'est entrer dans une relation, c'est-à-dire connaître Jésus (vv. 12,19, 25-26)

Ces versets présentent la révélation progressive que Jésus fait de lui-même à la Samaritaine, et la découverte pas à pas de son mystère par la Samaritaine. Au verset 9, Jésus la rencontre en étranger. Au verset 12. La femme estime que Jésus est un prophète, après qu'il lui ait révélé sa situation conjugale. Finalement, Jésus s'identifie au Messie, après que la femme ait déclaré qu'elle sait que le Messie doit venir. Lors de la révélation progressive que Jésus fait de Lui-même et de la prise de conscience par la femme de la vraie nature de Jésus, il est important de remarquer qu'elle commence à croire en Lui non en raison de signes, mais simplement à cause de ses paroles. Ce n'était pas le cas des disciples qui crurent en Lui (*Jn 2,11*) après avoir vu sa gloire dans le miracle de Cana; ici la foi d'abord hésitante de cette femme est simplement une réponse aux paroles de Jésus.²⁰

Le verset 26 est le plus significatif de cette section, car Jésus s'y identifie comme étant le Messie. Après le retour des disciples, la femme retourne au village mais laisse derrière elle sa cruche, leur donnant ainsi la possibilité de boire l'eau du puits. Elle invite ensuite les villageois à venir voir un homme qu'elle a rencontré et qui lui a révélé les secrets de sa vie. Elle conclut enfin avec la question: «Ne serait-ce pas le Christ?» (*Jn 4,29*).²¹

2.3. Amener les autres à Jésus (vv. 31-38,39-42)

Comme la mère de Jésus (*Jn 2, 3-5*), comme André et Philippe (*Jn 1,41-42,45-46*), la Samaritaine invite les gens de Sychar à venir à Jésus. Il est certain qu'elle joue un rôle important, puisque le village arrive à croire en Jésus comme Sauveur du monde. Nous lisons que beaucoup crurent en lui, à cause du témoignage de cette femme (*Jn 4,39*). Cependant, à la fin des deux jours que Jésus a passé avec eux, les Samaritains avouent qu'ils sont arrivés à croire en Lui, non en raison du témoignage de la femme, mais parce qu'ils ont rencontré Jésus personnellement et qu'ils l'ont entendu se révéler (*Jn 4,42*). Ce dernier verset ne dénigre pas le rôle de la Samaritaine, mais fait ressortir, selon le quatrième Evangile, un aspect essentiel de la foi en Jésus et de la condition de disciple, c'est-à-dire que la foi plénière résulte d'une rencontre directe avec lui, *eo ipso*. Toute la coopération humaine ne consiste qu'à accomplir ce qu'a fait la Samaritaine et d'autres avant elle, c'est-à-dire inviter les gens à venir voir. Dans cet épisode, si la femme joue un rôle important dans la conversion des villageois, pouvons-nous affirmer, comme Boers et Fiorenza par exemple, qu'elle a joué un rôle important dans la première mission chrétienne en Samarie? A ce sujet, Boers déclare:

«[La femme] a semé; elle n'est pas la même que celui qui va récolter la moisson qui a mûri dans les champs, mais elle se réjouit avec lui de la moisson. Elle collabore avec

Jésus d'une manière sans précédent, d'une manière même plus concrète que Jean Baptiste, dans le sens que Jean n'a fait qu'indiquer Jésus comme "l'agneau de Dieu qui ôte les péchés du monde" (Jn 1,92). La femme a une part active auprès de Jésus en faisant la volonté de son Père». ²²

Fiorenza estime que les *autres* du verset 38 se réfèrent à la Samaritaine, que le mot *labor* se réfère à son travail missionnaire, et que donc «cette femme est caractérisée comme représentative de la mission en Samarie». ²³ Ainsi, ses activités peuvent être classées au mieux comme *quasi-apostoliques*. ²⁴ Un examen plus attentif de l'échange entre Jésus et ses disciples est capital. Jésus se réfère à la Samarie comme à des champs mûrs pour la moisson. Il dit aux disciples qu'ils récolteront ce qu'ils n'ont pas semé. D'autres ont peiné (Jn 4,36-38). Il semble que Jésus parle de l'évangélisation de la Samarie, qui apparemment n'a pas été accomplie par ceux qui le suivent. Dans ce contexte on pourrait attribuer à la femme et à d'autres comme elle un rôle majeur dans la fondation d'une communauté chrétienne à Samarie. Cependant, il n'y a rien dans les paroles de Jésus qui indiquerait des mandats communautaires ou une mission officielle de la part de l'Eglise. Il s'agit probablement de femmes et d'hommes qui ont saisi l'occasion de proclamer Jésus à ceux qui étaient assez ouverts pour les écouter.

La Samaritaine conduit les villageois à Jésus. Ainsi un plus grand nombre ont entendu les paroles de Jésus et sont arrivés à comprendre dans le sens le plus plénier du terme qu'il est le *Sauveur du monde*. ²⁵ Les paroles des villageois à la Samaritaine ne diminuent pas son rôle de témoin, mais signalent plutôt la rencontre personnelle des villageois avec Jésus et l'écoute de ses paroles. ²⁶

2.4. Résumé de la section

Dans le quatrième Evangile, le fait d'être disciple signifie une relation personnelle avec Jésus, ce qui implique une foi active en ses paroles et en Lui, sans aucun *signe* visible. Ce qui est important dans cette péricope est le fait que même quelqu'un qui vient de faire ses premiers pas dans la foi et dans la vie de disciple peut devenir actif pour amener d'autres à Jésus, et ainsi se trouver engagé dans l'œuvre de l'évangélisation. Il n'est pas nécessaire d'attendre que l'on soit arrivé à une maturité dans la foi avant de commencer à servir et à participer à la mission d'amener Jésus à d'autres personnes, ou d'autres personnes à Jésus. La Samaritaine agit d'une manière semblable à celle d'André et de Philippe, qui, après leur première rencontre avec Jésus, ont amené d'autres personnes à lui (Jn 1). ²⁷ Dans le quatrième évangile il est clair que des hommes et des femmes prennent l'initiative de l'évangélisation, et cela était probablement vrai de la communauté johannique.

3 MARTHE DE BÉTHANIE (JN 11,1-44)

3.1. La femme, disciple que Jésus aimait

On donne habituellement au chapitre 11 de Jean le titre de *résurrection de Lazare*, mais il faut remarquer que la plus grande partie du récit semble se concentrer sur la conversation de Jésus avec Marthe, bien que la résurrection de Lazare soit capitale. En fait, *sur les quarante-quatre versets de ce récit, sept seulement ont lieu au tombeau de Lazare* (Jn 11,38-44). ²⁸ Bien que Marie soit mentionnée, l'accent est mis sur Marthe car Marie n'y ajoute rien de plus que Marthe. L'onction de Jésus pour sa sépulture (Jn 12), sera traitée séparément plus loin. Cependant, le fait que les deux soient nommées semble indiquer qu'une plus grande importance est accordée aux deux femmes. Bien que Lazare soit nommé le premier (Jn 11,1), son village, Béthanie, est identifié avec celui de Marie et de Marthe. Le verset suivant explique qui est Marie, c'est-à-dire, celle qui a oint Jésus (Jn 12,3).

Les soeurs ont envoyé un mot à Jésus sur la maladie de Lazare (Jn 11,3). Au verset 5, Marthe est mentionnée la première et Lazare le dernier, comme les trois personnes aimées de Jésus. A ce sujet quelques féministes affirment: *Peut-être ces femmes étaient plus près de Jésus que Lazare, ou étaient prééminentes ou plus importantes que Lazare, aux yeux de l'évangéliste*. ²⁹ Cependant, un examen attentif du texte montre que chacun des trois est mentionné une fois en premier lieu: Lazare au verset 1, Marie au verset 2 et Marthe au verset 5. Il est donc impossible de mettre les soeurs en opposition avec leur frère, comme étant plus près de Jésus ou davantage aimées par Jésus. Il n'y a pas de preuves suffisantes dans le texte pour justifier de telles déclarations. Ce qui nous intéresse dans

cet épisode c'est l'interaction entre Jésus et Marthe. Elle a déjà apparemment une relation de disciple avec Jésus, parce qu'elle est caractérisée comme une personne aimée de Jésus, ainsi que son frère Lazare et sa soeur Marie. Comme en d'autres rencontres, Jésus la conduit à s'engager envers Lui par une foi plus profonde et ainsi à le suivre avec plus de maturité.

3.2. Croissance dans l'état de disciple

Une lecture attentive du texte révèle où Marthe en est dans sa relation avec Jésus. D'abord, on nous dit qu'elle prend l'initiative de rencontrer Jésus dès qu'elle apprend qu'il approche de Béthanie (*Jn*, 11,20). Elle est convaincue que Dieu entend la prière de Jésus et lui accorde tout ce qu'il lui demande (*Jn* 11,22). Voilà pourquoi elle est aussi convaincue que Lazare ne serait pas mort si Jésus avait été présent. Lorsque Jésus l'assure que son frère ressuscitera, elle manifeste sa foi en la résurrection des morts à la fin des temps (*Jn* 11,23 sv). C'est ici que Jésus se révèle à elle d'une manière nouvelle. La résurrection des morts, affirme-t-il, est déjà effectivement réalisée en sa personne actuellement présente (*Jn* 11,25-26). Il lui demande ensuite si elle le croit. Elle prononce alors sa profession de foi; elle comprend davantage non seulement qui est Jésus, mais aussi comment le suivre en tant que disciple. Elle lui dit. *Oui, Seigneur, je crois que tu es le Christ, je crois que tu es le Fils de Dieu, celui qui vient dans le monde.*³⁰ Ainsi prononce-t-elle une profession de foi qui mène à la vie éternelle (*Jn* 20,30 sv). C'est pourquoi Schnackenburg et Schneiders considèrent que sa profession est l'une des plus complètes du quatrième Evangile.³¹ Ces deux exégètes ont raison si la foi est comprise simplement comme une conviction qui s'exprime verbalement. Marthe a déjà développé sa capacité de suivre Jésus, mais il lui est demandé de la faire croître davantage encore. Elle doit traduire sa foi, sa confiance et son engagement envers Jésus par un acte concret au tombeau. Marthe est ébranlée lorsqu'il lui demande de faire ôter la pierre à l'entrée du tombeau de Lazare. C'est alors qu'elle hésite. Elle ne paraît plus du tout sûre que Jésus soit la résurrection et la vie. Elle l'avertit de l'odeur de mort puisque que le corps de Lazare se trouve au tombeau depuis quatre jours. Jésus lui rappelle alors qu'elle verra la gloire de Dieu si elle croit. Marthe s'engage plus profondément envers la révélation que Jésus fait de Lui-même. Elle fait ôter la pierre. Ce n'est qu'au moment où le consentement intellectuel et l'action concrète se conjuguent que Marthe accomplit un pas de géant dans la suite de Jésus comme disciple. L'obéissance à ses paroles fait revenir Lazare à la vie, comme signe que Jésus est vraiment la résurrection et la vie.³² Enfin, Jésus rend grâce au Père, *à cause de cette foule qui m'entoure, afin qu'ils croient que tu m'as envoyé* (v. 42). Jésus accomplit ce signe, non pour rendre simplement la vie à un ami décédé, mais pour convaincre les spectateurs juifs de son identité. De son côté, Marthe est appelée à mettre sa foi en pratique devant les Juifs venus aux funérailles pour accompagner les soeurs.³³

3.3. Résumé de la section

En somme, on peut dire que dans ce récit Marthe représente la communauté johannique dans une confession chrétienne de foi totale en Jésus. Elle est parmi les disciples que Jésus aimait (*Jn* 11,5) parce qu'elle croit qu'il est la résurrection et la vie et parce qu'elle demeure en sa parole et lui obéit. Ainsi apparaît-elle comme un modèle du disciple dans la communauté johannique, bien qu'elle ne joue aucun rôle évident de leadership.

4. MARIE DE BÉTHANIE (JN 12,1-8)

Marie paraît d'abord en *Jean* 11, 1-2. Après avoir décrit Béthanie comme *le village de Marie et de sa soeur Marthe*, le quatrième évangéliste continue en précisant que Marie est celle *qui avait oint le Seigneur d'une huile parfumée et lui avait essuyé les pieds avec ses cheveux*. En l'introduisant au Chapitre 11, le quatrième évangéliste signale d'avance l'importance du rôle de Marie dans la communauté johannique. Sa proximité avec Jésus est soulignée lorsque son nom apparaît avant celui de Marthe (*Jn* 11, 1). La section qui suit vise à étudier son rôle comme disciple de Jésus.

4.1. La femme, disciple que Jésus aimait³⁴

Pour commencer, un regard sur le cadre de cet événement aidera à mieux apprécier

le rôle de Marie dans cette scène. C'était six jours avant la Pâques, tandis que Jésus prenait son repas avec Lazare et ses disciples (*Jn* 12,2-4); Marie oint les pieds de Jésus d'un parfum précieux et les essuie avec ses cheveux. Lorsque Judas Iscariote proteste parce que le parfum aurait dû être vendu et l'argent donné aux pauvres, Jésus défend l'acte de Marie et dit qu'elle l'a oint pour sa sépulture (*Jn* 12,7). Avant de rechercher un sens symbolique à l'acte de Marie ou de discuter d'une ressemblance avec le lavement des pieds de Jean 13,³⁵ il faut faire remarquer un autre élément: lorsque les deux soeurs, Marie et Marthe, ont demandé à Jésus de venir à Béthanie pour aider leur frère Lazare, elles le ramenèrent en Judée et à Jérusalem, l'obligeant donc à s'exposer à un danger mortel (*Jn* 11, 8, 16). Par amour, Marie fait une offrande semblable à celle de Jésus. La valeur du parfum — plus de 300 deniers — aurait fait vivre une famille de quatre à six personnes dans la campagne de Palestine pendant un an.³⁶ Par son geste, Marie met en relief un aspect essentiel du disciple et de la foi.³⁷ La présence de Jésus ne peut être «payée en retour» que par le don total de soi. Elle diffère ainsi de Judas qui proteste devant le service qu'elle rend à Jésus. Elle aime et elle se donne,³⁸ tandis que Judas trahira Jésus et le livrera aux mains de ses ennemis.³⁹

4.2. Marie et Jésus

Dans un geste extravagant, Marie prend une livre de nard pur, et après avoir oint les pieds de Jésus, elle les essuie avec ses cheveux. Tout d'abord, il est frappant que Marie oigne les pieds de Jésus, parce que normalement on oint la tête d'une personne, et non ses pieds.⁴⁰ Par cet acte, Marie anticipe le geste de Jésus qui montrera son amour en lavant les pieds de ses disciples et en les essuyant d'un linge (*Jn* 13.1-14).⁴¹ Elle annonce ainsi la mort et la sépulture de Jésus, comme il a été dit plus haut.⁴²

4.3. Le disciple en acte: garder le commandement de l'amour

Après avoir établi la relation entre l'onction de Jésus et sa sépulture, on peut dire que Marie a accompli un acte prophétique qui anticipe et pré-pare l'heure de Jésus.⁴³ Pour nous centrer davantage sur cette relation (*Jn* 12,7), on peut constater le lien qui existe entre Marie qui essuie les pieds de Jésus avec ses cheveux, et Jésus qui lave les pieds de ses disciples lors de la dernière Cène. En reliant les deux épisodes, on est amené à comprendre que Marie est vraiment disciple de Jésus.⁴⁴ Après le lavement des pieds (*Jn* 13), Jésus ordonne à ses disciples de se laver les pieds les uns aux autres, à son exemple, de s'aimer les uns les autres, et même de donner sa vie pour ses frères et soeurs. En un sens, on peut dire que le geste de Marie accomplit déjà d'avance le commandement de l'amour que Jésus donne à ses disciples, et donc qu'elle agit déjà en tant que disciple.

4.4. Le disciple en acte: Suivre Jésus jusqu'à la Croix

Comme il existe un lien symbolique entre la sépulture de Jésus et l'onction de ses pieds par Marie, entre le lavement des pieds à la dernière Cène et Marie qui essuie les pieds de Jésus, il y a aussi une signification symbolique dans le prix de l'huile parfumée. En effet, le prix de l'huile est en lien avec le sacrifice du Christ sur la croix et le prix à payer pour le suivre. Janet Gaden et John Gaden expriment clairement le lien entre la mort de Jésus et Marie qui est son disciple, lorsqu'ils écrivent: *ce Messie est celui qui doit perdre sa vie afin de porter beaucoup de fruit, et elle est la servante dont l'onction précieuse signifie le coût de l'engagement total du disciple.*⁴⁵

4.5. Résumé de la section

Dans la communauté johannique, le disciple vit fidèlement le commandement nouveau de l'amour au service du Seigneur et des autres. On peut dire que Marie de Béthanie agit non seulement en vrai disciple au service du Seigneur, en anticipant son *heure* et en gardant son commandement d'amour (*Jn* 15), mais qu'elle est aussi dans la communauté un modèle parfait du disciple, même si elle n'y assume aucun leadership.

5 MARIE MADELEINE (JN 20,1-2,11-18)

5.1. Une femme disciple: premier témoin de la Résurrection

Le récit de *Jean* 20,1-18 réunit en un tout ceux qui concernent les femmes, qui,

selon la tradition, viennent au tombeau tôt le matin du premier jour de la semaine (*Jn* 20,1-2). Marie Madeleine est la seule femme mentionnée. Lorsqu'elle s'exprime, seul le pronom personnel au pluriel révèle qu'elle n'est pas seule: *Nous ne savons pas où ils l'ont mis* (*Jn* 20,2).⁴⁶ Le texte est alors interrompu par une narration sur Pierre et le disciple bien-aimé qui vont examiner le tombeau vide (*Jn* 20,3-9). Le verset 10 nous informe que les disciples sont retournés chez eux, tandis que la suite du récit se réfère à Marie Madeleine (*Jn* 20,10-18). Au verset 11, celle-ci se trouve à nouveau au tombeau. Cette nouvelle présence brusque et sans préparation de Marie révèle le travail de rédaction de l'évangéliste qui aurait inséré lui-même entre les versets 2 et 11 l'épisode des deux disciples au tombeau.⁴⁷ Marie Madeleine est inconsolable, parce que le corps de Jésus a disparu. La présence des anges au tombeau ne l'impressionne pas, parce qu'elle est centrée sur la disparition du corps. Ce même motif la rend aveugle à la présence de Jésus qu'elle prend pour le jardinier. Ce n'est que lorsque le Seigneur l'appelle par son nom qu'elle finit par le reconnaître.⁴⁸ Marie Madeleine est présentée comme une des femmes qui suivaient Jésus. On ne dit rien de sa foi en lui. On sait qu'elle était là au pied de la croix, puis au tombeau avec d'autres femmes. Deux faits sont clairs: 1° elle aimait Jésus et 2° elle ne croyait pas en la résurrection des morts, malgré toute sa foi en lui.⁴⁹ Dans sa brève rencontre avec lui, sa foi est amenée à se perfectionner et donc à la préparer à sa mission. Jésus l'envoie à ses frères, les disciples, avec la bonne nouvelle de son exaltation en présence de Dieu (*Jn* 20,17). Elle remplit sa mission (*Jn* 20,18).⁵⁰

5.2. Marie Madeleine: Apôtre des Apôtres⁵¹

Tous les évangiles rapportent qu'un groupe de femmes arrive au tombeau tôt le matin du premier jour de la semaine.⁵² Dans l'Évangile de Marc, elles reçoivent d'un homme vêtu de blanc la mission d'apporter la bonne nouvelle de la résurrection aux disciples. Cependant, les femmes s'enfuient du tombeau effrayées et ne disent rien à personne (*Mc* 16, 1-8). Matthieu reprend le même récit, mais, sur le chemin du tombeau, Jésus rencontre les femmes qui lui saisissent les pieds. Jésus leur donne alors la mission de dire aux disciples qu'ils le verront en Galilée (*Mt* 28,1,8-10). Luc aussi rapporte que les femmes reçurent au tombeau le message de la résurrection de la part de deux hommes en vêtements éblouissants, mais lorsque les femmes l'annoncèrent aux disciples, ceux-ci ne les crurent pas (*Lc* 24,1-11). Luc ajoute alors que Pierre courut au tombeau, où il ne trouva que les bandelettes (*Lc* 24,12). Le quatrième Évangile reprend la même tradition que les Évangiles synoptiques.⁵³ Comme nous l'avons dit antérieurement, il note aussi qu'un groupe de femmes s'est rendu au tombeau et que parmi celles-ci il y avait Marie Madeleine. Le récit continue en se centrant uniquement sur une seule femme, Marie Madeleine. Bien qu'il ne mette qu'elle en relief, tout en reprenant à son compte la tradition, on pourrait dire que les femmes qui avaient suivi Jésus étaient mandatées à être les premiers témoins de la résurrection, afin d'annoncer cette bonne nouvelle aux hommes, les disciples. Sauf dans l'Évangile de Marc, les femmes, et évidemment Marie Madeleine, ont rempli fidèlement ce mandat reçu du Seigneur ressuscité. Ainsi, elles remplissaient un service que Jésus leur avait confié. Peut-on dire davantage sur un rôle permanent de leadership donné aux femmes par ce mandat de Jésus? D'abord, il faut constater que l'on ne sait plus rien de ces femmes, car elles disparaissent de la scène lorsque leur rôle est terminé. Toutefois le quatrième Évangile donne en exemple des hommes et des femmes qui, sans aucun rôle ou fonction officielle, témoignent en faveur du Christ et conduisent d'autres jusqu'à lui. En reprenant ce qui a été dit plus haut, cela est vrai d'André, de Philippe (*Jn* 1,41 sv. et 45 sv.)⁵⁴ et de la Samaritaine (*Jn* 4,29 sv.). On peut probablement aussi l'affirmer de Marie Madeleine et des autres femmes au tombeau, bien que les Évangiles n'en disent rien.

5.3. Résumé de la section

Dans la communauté johannique, pour être disciple il faut une relation fondamentale et personnelle avec Jésus: *Je connais mes brebis; mes brebis écoutent ma voix* (cf. 10,4,14,27). Marie Madeleine cherche Jésus tôt le matin; Jésus l'appelle par son nom; elle le reconnaît et suit son ordre d'aller l'annoncer aux disciples. On peut affirmer qu'elle est disciple et que par son annonce du Seigneur ressuscité elle a joué un rôle de leadership dans le quatrième Évangile, même si on ne peut affirmer qu'elle ait exercé ce rôle d'une manière continue,⁵⁵ car l'Évangile n'en fournit aucune preuve. Sur la base des exemples donnés, on peut supposer, comme cela a

déjà été dit, qu'elle-même et les autres femmes ont continué à témoigner, en même temps que les hommes, du Seigneur ressuscité, et qu'elles ont ainsi joué un rôle dans la fondation de la communauté johannique.

CONCLUSION

D'après cette recherche sur les femmes du quatrième Evangile, on voit clairement que toutes les cinq — la mère de Jésus, la Samaritaine, Marthe et Marie de Béthanie et Marie Madeleine — sont présentées comme des disciples de Jésus. Dans chaque cas, les femmes sont appelées à accueillir Jésus tel qu'il est, à accueillir le salut qui leur est offert, et cela d'une manière plus profonde et plus plénière. Presque chaque fois, les femmes répondent en amenant d'autres personnes à Jésus: elles les appellent à obéir à sa parole et les encouragent à aller rencontrer Jésus personnellement, à témoigner devant d'autres de leur foi nouvelle comme Marthe au tombeau de Lazare, ou à devenir des messagères de la résurrection, comme Marie de Magdala. La mère de Jésus est présentée comme une femme qui a pleinement confiance que son Fils agira. Elle s'engage à le suivre et encourage les serviteurs à exécuter ce qu'il dira. Qu'elle ait alors commencé un parcours de disciple devient clair lorsqu'on la rencontre au pied de la croix. Elle est là à la fin du ministère de Jésus comme elle l'a été au début. La nouvelle communauté est née à la croix. Cette nouvelle communauté lui est confiée, lorsque Jésus l'appelle la mère de ses disciples bien-aimés. Elle est liée à cette nouvelle communauté pour accomplir son désir ardent d'une rédemption plénière, comme on le voit lorsqu'en tant que porte-parole d'Israël, elle dit à Jésus à Cana: *Ils n'ont plus de vin (Jn 2,3)*. La Samaritaine apparaît ensuite dans l'Evangile. Contrairement à la mère de Jésus, elle n'a pas eu de relation antérieure avec lui. Il la conduit pas à pas à reconnaître qui il est. La découverte la plus importante est que cette femme, entièrement convaincue que Jésus est vraiment le Messie, devient l'intermédiaire pour amener les villageois à Jésus, et, par leur rencontre avec Lui, à croire en Lui, ce qui est manifeste par leur confession qu'il est le Sauveur du monde (*Jn 4,52*).



La présentation des femmes continue avec Marthe et Marie de Béthanie. Contrairement à la Samaritaine, Marthe est déjà en relation avec Jésus. Elle sait qui il est, au moins, selon la foi juive. Lors de sa rencontre avec Jésus, elle est conduite à un engagement de foi plus profond et plus complet, car il est la résurrection et la vie actuellement présente. Elle affirme sa foi lorsqu'elle confesse Jésus comme le Christ, le Fils de Dieu (*Jn 11,27*) et lorsqu'elle permet que la pierre du tombeau soit roulée (*Jn 11,39-41*). Marie, la soeur de Marthe, suit Jésus avant qu'elle n'apparaisse dans *Jean 11* et *12*. Notre étude s'est centrée sur son geste prophétique (*Jn 12*), plutôt que sur sa présence (*Jn 11*), où celle-ci apparaît simplement comme un doublet de l'interaction entre Marthe et Jésus. *Jean 12,3* décrit le geste de Marie qui oint les pieds de Jésus avec un parfum coûteux et les essuie avec ses cheveux. Ce geste rappelle celui de Jésus qui a lavé les pieds de ses disciples, les a essuyés avec un linge et puis leur a commandé de donner leur vie les uns pour les autres. Jésus interprète le geste de Marie comme annonciateur de la préparation de son corps pour la sépulture. Surtout, son geste est un acte d'amour en réponse à l'acte de Jésus qui ressuscite Lazare des morts. Cet acte coûtera à Jésus sa vie; Marie l'apprécie et est prête à donner quelque chose de très précieux en retour. Marie Madeleine représente le groupe de femmes venues au tombeau le matin du premier jour de la semaine; elle reçoit une mission du Seigneur ressuscité; apporter le message pascal aux disciples. On la

montre remplissant fidèlement cette mission.

Quant aux responsabilités, il n'y a dans le quatrième Evangile qu'une femme et qu'un homme qui reçoivent un mandat de la part du Seigneur ressuscité. Marie Madeleine est envoyée aux disciples pour leur annoncer la résurrection du Seigneur, et Simon Pierre, après avoir affirmé son amour pour lui, reçoit de lui la mission de paître ses brebis. Ni Pierre ni Marie ne sont garants de la révélation de Jésus à la communauté johannique. Ce rôle est réservé au disciple bien-aimé (*Jn* 19,35; 21,24), qui n'a pas reçu de mission explicite; son autorité est fondée sur l'amour du Seigneur pour lui, et sur son amour pour le Seigneur. Bien que nous apprenions que Marie Madeleine a accompli sa mission, nous ne savons plus rien d'autre à son sujet et, si l'on s'en tient à l'Evangile, on ne peut rien dire sur le fait qu'elle aurait exercé un rôle de responsabilité dans la communauté. Malheureusement, on n'apprend rien non plus sur la manière dont Pierre a rempli sa mission. Tous les autres, qu'ils soient hommes ou femmes, semblent assurer le même service, celui de conduire d'autres personnes à Jésus, de les faire obéir à sa parole. L'Evangile ne donne pas suffisamment d'informations pour que l'on puisse dire quoi que ce soit de précis sur des structures ou des offices de leadership dans la communauté johannique. On manque aussi d'informations pour affirmer comment la mission de Pierre devait se réaliser. On sait seulement qu'à Pierre il est demandé s'il aime Jésus, et qu'alors les brebis de Jésus lui sont confiées. Cependant, si le leadership dépend d'une initiative créatrice et d'une action décisive, ces cinq femmes sont bien qualifiées pour des rôles de disciples. En d'autres mots, en deux affirmations importantes du quatrième Evangile, c'est la relation à Jésus qui fonde le leadership et le service. Les hommes et les femmes sont appelés au même titre à être des disciples du Seigneur, à le faire connaître aux autres, à vivre le seul commandement de la communauté johannique, celui de s'aimer les uns les autres comme le Seigneur nous a aimés.

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Notes

¹ SCHNACKENBURG R., *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 1 (Londres: Burns & Oates, 1980), 567.

² van den BUSSCHE H., *The Gospel of the Word*, (Chicago: Priory Press, 1967), 38-39.

³ La traduction grecque dit littéralement. « Qu'est-ce cela pour moi et pour toi, femme? Mon heure n'est pas encore venue ».

⁴ SCHNACKENBURG R., *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 3. 278-79.

⁵ Cf. VERNEY S., *Water Into Wine: An Introduction to John's Gospel*, (Londres: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), 33.

⁶ MOLONEY F.J., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 4, éd. Harrington D.J., SJ, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 67-68.

⁷ Cf. FEHRIBACH A., *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 128-129; COLLINS R.F., «Cana (*Jn* 2:1-12) – The First of His Signs or the Key to His Signs?», *Irish Theological Quarterly* 47 (1980): 86.

⁸ L'Ancien Testament décrit la joie des derniers jours par une abondance de vin (cf. Amos 9,13-14; Osée 14,7; Jérémie 31,12). Enoch prédit que la vigne donnera du vin en abondance (10,19) et II Baruch (apocryphe) 19,5 affirme: « La terre donnera son fruit au centuple; chaque vigne donnera 1000 bouquets et chaque bouquet donnera 1000 grappes, et chaque grappe environ 120 "gallons" (453 litres) de vin ». BROWN R.E., «*The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*», *The Anchor Bible*, I-XII, XIII-XXI (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966), 105 Brown mentionne ici Irénée, *Advenus haereses*, 5,33:34, dont la citation est la suivante: « Les jours viendront dans lesquels les vignes pousseront ayant chacune dix mille branches, et à chaque branche dix mille sarments, et à chaque sarment dix mille bouquets, et à chacun des bouquets dix mille grappes, et chaque grappe, une fois passée au pressoir, donnera 25 "metretes" (985 litres) de vin ».

⁹ MOLONEY F.J., 505-06; FEUILLET A., *Johannine Studies*, (New York: Alba House, 1964), 285-288; cf. BUBY B., *Mary, the Faithful Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 106.

¹⁰ BROWN, I-XII. 108 ; cf. SCHNACKENBURG R., Vol. 3, 278; COLLINS, «*Mary in the Fourth Gospel: A Decade of Johannine Studies*», *Louvain Studies* 3 (1970): 134; LIEU J.V. «The Mother of the Son in the Fourth Gospel», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 71; CULPEPPER R.A., *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 133-134.

¹¹ BROWN, «*Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel*» *Theological Studies* 36 (1975): 698-699; BROWN, «*The Mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*», in *L'Evangile de Jean: sources, rédaction, théologie*, éd. de JONGE M., *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* XLIV (Leuven University Press, 1977), 310; cf. KARRIS R.J., «Jésus

and the, *Marginalized in John's Gospel*», *Zaccheus Studies: New Testament*, éd. GETTY M.A. (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1990), 80; GRASSI J.A., «*The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel: A Reappraisal*», *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 73; TURID KARLSEN SEIM, «*Roles of Women in the Gospel of John*», in *Aspects of Johannine Literature*, éditeurs: Lars Hartman et Birger Olsson, ConB NT Séries, No, 18 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), 62-65.

¹² GILMAN F.M., «*The Women of John's Gospel*», *Bible Today* 40 (2/2002): 93, cf. COLLINS, «*Mary in the Fourth Gospel*», 132-136; MOLONEY F.J., *Woman in the New Testament*, (Pasay City: Saint Paul Publications, 1984), 133-134.

¹³ BERGANT D. and KARRIS R.J., *The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Based on the New American Bible With Revised New Testament* (Collegeville. MN: Liturgical Press. 1989), 1013.

¹⁴ Pierre affirme son amour pour Jésus avant de recevoir la mission de paître ses agneaux. Au chapitre 13 de Jean, les disciples sont appelés à imiter l'amour de Jésus, tel qu'il l'a exprimé dans le lavement des pieds.

¹⁵ CONWAY C. M., *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johanne Characterization*, SBL Dissertation Séries, No. 167 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 74.

¹⁶ SCHNACKENBURG R., Vol. 1, 567.

¹⁷ MONTGOMERY J.A., *The Samaritans, the Earliest Jewish Sect: Their History, Theology and Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1968), 158-159.

¹⁸ Cf. BULTMANN R., *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 181-182; BROWN, «*The Gospel according to John*», 178.

¹⁹ BLIGH J., «*Jesus in Samaria*», *Heythrop Journal* 3 (1962): 333.

²⁰ WITHERINGTON B., *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, éd. Witherington A. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 70.

²¹ PAZDAN M.M., «*Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman: Contrasting Models of Discipleship*», *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 17 (1987): 148; CARMICHAEL C.M., «*Marriage and the Samaritan Woman*», *New Testament Studies* 26 (1980): 343-344.

²² BOERS H., *Neither on this Mountain or in Jerusalem: A Study of John 4*, SBL Monograph Series, No. 35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 184-185.

²³ FIORENZA E.S., *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 327.

²⁴ BROWN, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 189; cf. THURSTON B., *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 85.

²⁵ MACCINI R.G., «*Her Testimony Is True: Women as Witnesses according to John*», *Journal of the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, No. 125 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 123: «Pour Jean, cette foi donnée en raison de la parole de la femme ne se situe pas au second rang, et elle n'a pas moins de valeur; elle ne fait nullement un simple premier pas vers la foi, en se fondant sur les paroles de Jésus. Nulle part en Saint Jean on ne trouve une foi plus grande ni plus profonde que celle qui est caractérisée par la phrase, "Ils crurent en lui"».

²⁶ SCHNEIDERS S.M., «*Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church*», *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12 (1982): 40: «Selon la perspective de Jean, le témoignage d'un disciple croyant amène une personne à Jésus, mais ensuite le disciple disparaît au fur et à mesure que le croyant en puissance rencontre Jésus lui-même».

²⁷ Cf. SEIM, 160.

²⁸ O'DAY G.R., «*John*», in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, éditeurs: Newson C. et Ringe S. (Londres: SPCK. 1992), 297.

²⁹ WITHERINGTON B., 105.

³⁰ RENA J., «*Women in John's Gospel*», *Theology Digest* 34 (1987): 244.

³¹ Cf. SCHNEIDERS S.M., «*Death in the Community of Eternal Life: History, Theology, and Spirituality in John 11*», *Interpretation* 51 (1987): 53; SCHNACKENBURG R., Vol. 2, 332-322.

³² SCHNEIDERS S.M., *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999), 106.

³³ CONWAY, 150.

³⁴ Il est évident que Marie n'est pas la seule que Jésus ait aimée. Lazare et Marthe sont aussi compris dans cet amour (Jn 11,3-5).

³⁵ PLATT E.E., «*The Ministry of Mary of Bethany*», *Theology Today* 34 (1997): 37.

³⁶ STEGEMANN E.W. and STEGEMANN W., *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century*, tr. Dean O.C. Jr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 82-83.

³⁷ GIBLIN C.H., «*Mary's Anointing for Jesus' Burial-Resurrection Un 12:1-8*», *Biblica* 73 (4/1992): 563.

³⁸ GRASSI, «*Women's Leadership Roles in John's Gospel*», *Bible Today* 35 (5/1997): 316, cf. LEE D.A., «*The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning*», *Journal for the Study of the New*

Testament Supplement Series. No. 95 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 222.

³⁹ KITZBERGER T.R., «Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala — Two Female Characters in the Johannine Passion Narrative. A Feminist Narrative-Critical Reader Response», *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 579-580.

⁴⁰ Cf. BROWN, «The Gospel According to John», 454.

⁴¹ SCHNEIDERS S.M., «Women in the Fourth Gospel», 42 ; cf. FIORENZA E.S., 330; GRASSI, «Women's Leadership Roles in John's Gospel». 316; MICHAELS J.R., «John 12:1-11», *Interpretation* 43 (1989):289.

⁴² O'DAY G.R., 299.

⁴³ RENA J., 244.

⁴⁴ KARRIS R.J., 90.

⁴⁵ GADEN J. and GADEN J., «Women and Discipleship in the New Testament», *The Way* 26 (1986): 121.

⁴⁶ BROWN, «The Gospel According to John», 1000; cf. BARRETT C.K., *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction With Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Londres: SPCK, 1965), 563; Schnackenburg, Vol. 3, 308; Barnabus Lindars, «The Gospel of John», *New Century Bible* (Londres: Oliphants, 1972), 600; Paul S. Minear, «"We Don't Know Where ..." John 20:2», *Interpretation* 30 (1976): 126.

⁴⁷ BROWN, «The Gospel According to John», 988; cf. NEYREY J., «The Resurrection Stories», *Zaccheus Studies: New Testament*, éd. Getty M.A. (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 66.

⁴⁸ BROWN, «The Gospel According to John», 1009-1010; cf. CONWAY, 195; BODE E.L., *The First Easter Morning: The Gospel Accounts for the Women's Visit to the Tomb of Jesus*, *Analecta Biblica: Investigationis Scientifica* in Res Biblicas, No. 45 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 83.

⁴⁹ SCHNEIDERS S.M., Vol. 3, 311.

⁵⁰ SCHNEIDERS S.M., «Women in the Fourth Gospel», 43; cf. CONWAY, 198.

⁵¹ BROWN, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 95; cf. FIORENZA E.S., 326,332-333; SCOTT M., «Sophia and the Johannine Jesus», *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, No. 71 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 225; WITHERINGTON B., 177, 280; LEE, «Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20», *Journal of Study for New Testament* 58 (1995): 4647; GRASSI, 317; BROCK A.G., *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 60.

⁵² Cf. O'COLLINS G. and KENDALL D., «Mary Magdalene as Major Witness to Jesus' Resurrection», *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): 633; PERKINS P., «'I Have Seen the Lord' (Jn 20:18): Women Witnesses to the Resurrection», *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 34-36.

⁵³ SETZER C., «Excellent Women: Female Witness to the Resurrection», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (2/1997): 262.

⁵⁴ HEARON H.E., *The Mary Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 160.

⁵⁵ THOMPSON M.R., *Mary of Magdala: Apostle and Leader* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 122.

Réf. : *OMNIS TERRA*, nn. 453 et 454, juin et juillet-août 2009, pp. 241-249 et pp. 283-290.

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