

Bulletin 2020

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SEDOS



FRATELLI TUTTI AND WOMEN

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SEDOS

*(Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission)
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Frontcover image: Christmas decoration at SEDOS office
Backcover image: Christmas greeting card from *The Printery House*, U.S.

Editorial



Dear Readers,

The latest Encyclical of Pope Francis, signed in Assisi, is called *Fratelli Tutti*. The aim of the Encyclical is to teach the need for *fraternity and social friendship*. It is a follow-up to the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, also known as the Abu Dhabi document, dated 4 February 2019. Although the Italian word “*fratelli*” and the English word “*fraternity*” includes both brothers and sisters, the Encyclical makes few remarks on the great contribution women make in the world. We thought therefore to select some articles that put women in the “religious” spotlight.

The first article is a guide to the Encyclical, written by Luigino Bruni in Italian for *Paoline Publications*. He mentions where the *contribution of women* could have been mentioned on several occasions. Besides that, the article gives a fine summary of its content.

The second article, by Fr. Subhash Anand, is a theological study of the New Testament regarding *the important role women have in the plan of God*. This role becomes especially clear in the different Infancy Narratives. The whole article describes how from the very beginning of the Church the equal value of both sexes in religious and ministerial life was stressed.

The next article by Fr. Gabriel Witaszek makes us aware of the fact that “the participation in the sanctity of God opens itself to *the pagans* as one can deduct from what happens between the Moabite Ruth and Noemi”. The Moabites were excluded from the Israelite community because of conflicts that had happened in the past, (Dt. 23:3-4).

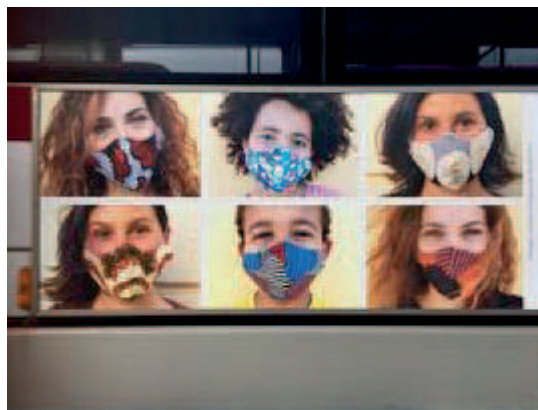
The last article in the context of the contribution of women to “fraternity” in the Church and the world is by Jesuit Father Lock Gauthier Malulu. He takes an aspect of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and makes a *negro-african reading* of it: a person in retreat has to contemplate at a certain moment on the meeting of the Resurrected Jesus with Mother Mary, the first person he appears to. This contemplation can be extended to the role of women in traditional African society as wife, mother, and the children’s relationship with their mother.

As our Document we have selected an article by Carles Such, SchP. Based on his experience in the slums of Lima, Peru, he discusses the effects of the *Covid-19 sanitary crisis* on the two possible ways we may live our religious life. Namely, one who lives as a *bear* and thinks only of its survival (which is not the same as being egoistic) or as an *ant* whose role may be that of a worker, a soldier, a princess, or a queen (which means to have an active role in society).

We close this year with an overview of the SEDOS’ activities as the Director reported at the *Annual General Assembly* on 4 December 2020, in Rome, but online.

Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM
Director of SEDOS

Keep Smiling!



Merry Christmas and Happy Newyear

Guide to Reading “*Fratelli Tutti*”

“Who is that man of medium build”, Jacob asked, “dressed in the elegance of this world?”. «Father, it is your son Joseph», Judas answered. With pain and love he looked at the face of the Egyptian for a long time and did not recognize him. It happened, however, that Joseph’s eyes, from the long gaze, were filled with tears that ran down his cheeks; and when the black of the eyes was all soft with weeping, behold, those were Rachel’s eyes.

(Thomas Mann, *Giuseppe e i suoi fratelli*)

Words and gestures of fraternity

Pope Francis wrote the first word of his speech on fraternity on the evening of 13 March 2013, when choosing his name. The name Francis contains many messages together, but its message is above all a message of fraternity — *fratres*, brothers, friars. During these seven years of his pontificate, Francis has continued to write many more words on fraternity: in the Encyclicals, in the documents, in the catechesis, in the homilies and in the many dialogues. But he didn't write the most beautiful words with a pen; he expressed them through his gestures, mute incarnate words. Like the one on 27 March 2020 when, alone in the silence of St. Peter's Square, he gave us his most beautiful speech on fraternity.

It is not easy to write an Encyclical on fraternity. The first difficulty is inscribed in the word itself. Fraternity in fact refers to the relationship between *brothers* and, therefore, it is not a particularly suitable word to express a universal bond that includes male and female on the level of equal dignity; a difficulty that cannot be overcome even by starting the Encyclical with a quotation from Saint Francis in order to relate it ideally and explicitly to the *Poverello* of Assisi.

Semantic imperfection is one of the many

weak aspects of fraternity. Also because, although the etymology refers to the relationship between brothers, we immediately notice that both its tone and the way it works reveal many traits proper to the talent of women. Starting with the family, were there no mother to ensure that each of the brothers and sisters receive a fair share, fraternity would not prevail at table or at play, but the law of the fittest. Along the roads that lead to our Jericho, to bend over and take care of the victims there are also, *and above all*, many, very many women. Women, who are the *magna pars* in retirement homes, in hospitals, at the bedside of untold nights of agony, have been there for millennia to take care of everyone. Under the Cross, in the greatest act of brotherhood/sisterhood, there were women, and it was women who went to anoint the body of the Lord on Holy Saturday, women continue to anoint the bodies on the holy Saturdays of life. Two sisters welcomed Jesus in Bethany, a widow hosted Elijah in her house and gave the prophet her last handful of flour and her very last drop of oil. Another woman poured perfumed oil over Jesus’ feet, an oil worth ten times more than the price of the treasurer's betrayal. He could not understand and still does not understand that waste, and continues to bemoan the fraternity’s inefficient use of the surplus funds. And it is not to be excluded that a woman wrote, or at least sang the splendid Psalm on fraternity thousands of times. Perhaps one evening during Passover, as a mother looked at her children happily gathered round the table, that great Psalm: “Behold, how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one”! (Ps 133[132]:1) burst from her heart. Clare is the other name of Francis.

The second difficulty is found in the Bible. Abel, the first brother, is a brother killed by a brother. Jacob and Esau fight, and separate. Then from, Leah and Rachel, the rival sisters, Jephthah chased away by his half-brothers, Amnon's/O'nan's disgraceful behaviour towards Ta'mar, (Gen 38:9) to the regrettable words of the prodigal son's brother. This shows us that the blood relationship, however great and often marvellous it can be, is not sufficient to understand biblical humanism, the new people, the Covenant, that new and different universal brotherhood. Thus, to indicate its new brotherhood unrelated to blood, the Bible does not stop at praising natural brotherhood, but highlights its inadequacy. Besides, we know that we would not be brothers and sisters for life if, at a certain point that bond of blood and flesh, however great and beautiful, were not to become a spiritual bond, that we might be reborn in this spirit.

The biblical foundation

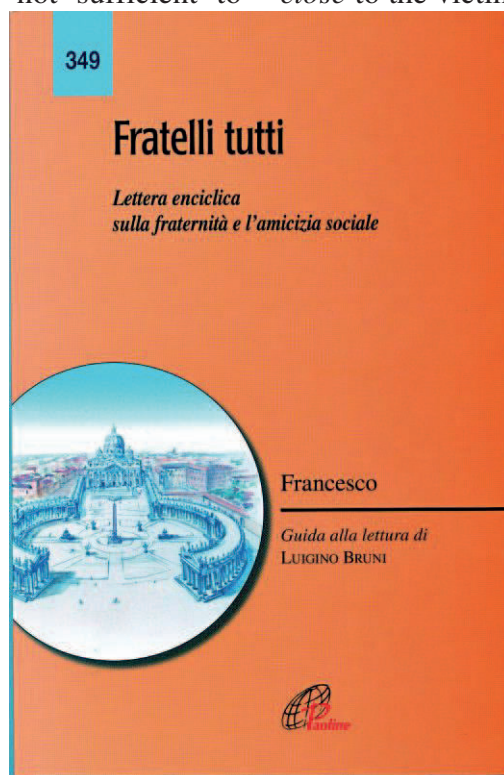
Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* has based his argument almost exclusively on the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke. A strong and important choice, which immediately shows that fraternity for Francis is *universal fraternity focussed on the victim*. Francis chooses to view the world beside the victims, whom he loves and judges from there, ever since the first journey he chose to make to Lampedusa. This was even at the cost of neglecting other basic dimensions of fraternity, such as *reciprocity*, which although a twin to — “love one another” — is (almost) absent from the text. The parable does not speak of blood brothers; it never mentions the word

“fraternity” to indicate any relationship. The question the Scribe asked: “Who is my neighbour?” gave rise to one of the most beautiful *incipits* in the whole of literature: “A man ... went down from Jerusalem to Jericho ...”, (Lk 10:30). The gist of this story lies in the comparison between *proximity and closeness*: — which of the passers-by on that road — bent over the victim becoming his *neighbour*? Only that Samaritan, the least *close* to the victim, because he was not a Jew but a member of an excommunicated people, whereas the Levite and the priest, those in that world who were responsible for care and assistance, were much closer to him, yet they passed by. The one who took care of the half-dead man did not do it because he was his neighbour, but because he chose to become a neighbour. Brothers are born such, but one becomes a neighbour by choice. Francis writes:

“The parable eloquently presents the basic decision we need to make in order to rebuild our wounded

world. In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan. Any other decision would make us either one of the robbers or one of those who walked by without showing compassion for the suffering of the man on the roadside. The distinction between Judean and Samaritan, priest and merchant, fade into insignificance. Now there were only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is wounded and those who pass by; those who bend over to help and those who look the other way and hurry past” (nn. 67, 70).

The next of kin, the brother and sister, in the Gospel were not the neighbour. In this case, neighbourliness was the essential dimension of this new and different fraternity. At this decisive point in *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope



happened to find an ally in the Nobel Prize winner for economics, Amartya Sen. Sen, an Indian, one of the most influential and original contemporary thinkers who is a layman and a representative of an oriental tradition (Hinduism), has proposed an interpretation of that parable very close Francis's. In Sen's view any concept of justice that claims to be just, that is, based on the fundamental principles of fairness and impartiality, needs the notion of proximity/neighbourliness to be totally free from geographical, ethnic, religious or community bonds. Sen writes:

*Duty to others is not confined only to those who live next to us. The events actually established a link between the Samaritan and the wounded Israelite. In that situation, he experienced a new proximity. There are very few in our world who we could not consider to be close to us.*¹

On the same lines Francis builds the spiritual and ethical framework of *Fratelli Tutti*. A first important fact concerns the religious dimension:

"One detail about the passers-by stands out: they were religious, devoted to the worship of God: a priest and a Levite. This detail should not be overlooked. It shows that belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God", (n. 74).

It is not enough to be a religious, to be brother/sister in the sense of the Gospel. The world is full of people who, after coming out of church, synagogue, mosque or temple, do not bend over the victims but pass on. We know nothing about that Samaritan except for his nationality, and we know even less about that victim ("a man ... went down ...": a man, like Job, like every victim). This shows us that the concept of fraternity in the Gospel, and therefore of Francis, is truly universal fraternity.

In taking this parable as the foundation of fraternity, Francis points to a broad, inclusive, inter-cultural and inter-religious fraternity, the widest possible. And this is really very nice.

There are two particularly important features. The first one is very suggestive: "Robbers' usually have secret allies in those who 'pass by and look the other way'", (n. 75). The second concerns an equally central challenge to Christianity; i.e. the risk we all too often run of being satisfied with the warmth of the community, avoiding the cold streets and suburbs:

"Authentic and mature love and true friendship can only take root in hearts open to growth through relationships with others. As couples or friends, we find that our hearts expand as we step out of ourselves and embrace others. Closed groups and self-absorbed couples that define themselves as "we" in opposition to others tend to be expressions of selfishness and mere self-preservation", (n. 89).

Political and economic consequences

After recalling the relationship of the three key words of modern democracy: freedom, equality, and fraternity (cf. nn.103, 104,105) Francis directly addresses some of the main issues of the Social Teaching of the Church, of his pontificate and of today's economy. The first treats the relationship between private property and the universal destination of goods. The Church has always recalled, from the days of the early Church Fathers, that the right to the private ownership of goods is *subordinate* to a more fundamental principle, namely that the goods we possess are a gift. This is a principle that has its roots in biblical humanism, where "the earth belongs to YAHWEH" and we are only tenants of the land that is always promised and given. In the course of Western history, private ownership has grown out of all proportion, to the point of being declared "sacred", while the universal destination of goods has been progressively eclipsed by modern legal systems. It is therefore significant that in replacing the principle of fraternity at the centre, the Pope has juxtaposed the principle of the universal destination of goods to it, because, while private property is the principle hinge of individual freedom, the universal destination is the cornerstone of a humanism of fraternity:

¹ A. Sen, *L'idea di giustizia*, Mondadori, Milano, 2010, p. 183.

“For my part, I would observe that ‘the Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property’. The principle of the common use of created goods is the ‘first principle of the whole ethical and social order’, it is a natural and inherent right that takes priority over others. All other rights having to do with the goods necessary for the integral fulfilment of persons, including that of private property and any other type of property should ‘in no way hinder [this right], but, should actively facilitate its implementation”, as was affirmed by Saint Paul VI, (n. 120).

Linked to the re-establishment of the order and priority of the principles regulating assets is the discourse on *entrepreneurs*:

“Business activity is essentially ‘a noble vocation, directed at producing wealth and improving our world’.¹⁰¹ God encourages us to develop the talents he gave us, and he has made our universe one of immense potential. In God’s plan, each individual is called to promote his or her own development,¹⁰² and this includes finding the best economic and technological means of multiplying goods and increasing wealth. Business abilities, which are a gift from God, should always be clearly directed to the development of others and to eliminating poverty, especially through the creation of diversified work opportunities”, (n. 123).

If the universal destination of goods has a basic, fundamental purpose, then also the goods produced by business, finance and that particular good called entrepreneurial *talent*, have a universal destination, subordinate only to the well-being of people/individuals. A concept contrary to that well-known metaphor of the “unseen hand”(Adam Smith), according to which the *entrepreneur*, motivated by private interests, neglects the common good and leaves it at the mercy of the objective mechanisms of the market. In the humanism of fraternity the unseen hand is inadequate; to this, which may even have a place, must be added a prior duty, the practical hand of whoever intentionally uses the goods and resources for the benefit of each and every person. It is the old precept of ‘put the common good first’ (the expression recurs 32 times in the

Encyclical), expressed in new language.

It is easy to see a Franciscan echo in this outline of the primacy of the universal destination of goods. St. Francis was so convinced that he was not the owner of the goods he had to use to live on, that the only right he asked for: was to *possess nothing* and live *sine proprio*. But the great Franciscan attempt to distinguish between the ownership of goods and their use failed. In 1322 Pope John XXII promulgated the Bull *Ad conditorem canonum* by which he established the impossibility of just *using* the goods, and attributed to the Order the *ownership* of the goods it used. In fact, the concrete Franciscan utopia failed to prevail and influence the economy of the West. But it is not dead, as it continues to challenge our economies and our legal systems. Because, if today we are not able to invent a way to use the common goods/resources without being their masters and predators, we will only end up destroying the resources and the planet. And it is here that *Fratelli Tutti* meets *Laudato Si’*. Francis thinks that inter-human fraternity will not be enough if it does not become cosmic fraternity: “*related ... with brother sun, sister moon*” (LS, n. 92). Returning to the human *pietas* of the Samaritan does not mean forgetting that due to Creation and the earth.

From the idea of fraternity based on the ethics of the Samaritan further political and economic consequences arise, issues at the centre of the public debate, which touch on the life of the weakest people of the earth. Francis’ gaze, that sees above all the least, the most vulnerable, the poorest, imbues the whole Encyclical. He views the world from this perspective, he places himself next to Lazarus, at the rich man’s gate, “who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table” (Lk 16:20) and from there he observes and judges today’s world and time.

One consequence regards an issue very dear to Pope Francis: “Our response to the arrival of migrants can be summarized by four verbs: welcome, protect, promote and integrate”, (n. 129). Migrants are to be received and seen in the perspective of

mutual exchange and benefit, not of alms (migrants have always brought and bring many advantages, the Pope recalls), but first they must be respected and welcomed in accord with the principle of spontaneous gratuitousness. Francis often moves on several levels at once, always indicating the moral order. He therefore specifies:

“Even so, I do not wish to limit this presentation to a kind of utilitarian approach. There is always the factor of “gratuitousness”: the ability to do some things simply because they are good in themselves, without concern for personal gain or recompense. Gratuitousness makes it possible to welcome the stranger, even though this brings us no immediate benefit. Some countries, though, presume to accept only scientists and investors”, (n. 139). *“Life without fraternal gratuitousness becomes a form of frenetic commerce, in which we are constantly weighing up what we will get in return. God, on the other hand, gives freely, even to the point of helping those who are unfaithful, ‘for he makes his sun rise on the bad and on the good’ (Mt 5:45), (n.140).*

Another theme of Francis’s classic and new Encyclical is the distinction he draws between *people*, *populace* and *populism*. Here, Francis is very critical of leaders *who use* the common people to their own advantage instead of *being at the service* of the people. He uses some very harsh words, among the strongest and most incisive in the text, which are typical of his literary style:

“Lack of concern for the vulnerable can hide behind a populism that exploits them demagogically for its own purposes, or a liberalism that serves the economic interests of the powerful. In both cases, it becomes difficult to envisage an open world that makes room for everyone, including the most vulnerable, and shows respect for different cultures”, (n. 155).

Furthermore:

“In recent years, the words ‘populism’ and ‘populist’ have invaded the communications media and everyday conversation. As a result they have lost whatever value they might have had, and have become another source of polarization in an already divided society. Efforts are made to classify entire peoples, groups, societies and governments as ‘populist’ or not. Nowadays it has become impossible for someone to express a view on any subject without being categorized one way or the other,

either to be unfairly discredited or to be praised to the skies”, (n. 156).

Francis is very hard on *populism* as he loves the *people* very much and wants to defend them from ideological manipulation:

“Closed populist groups distort the word ‘people’, since they are not talking about a true people. The concept of ‘people’ is in fact open-ended. A living and dynamic people, a people with a future, is one constantly open to a new synthesis through its ability to welcome differences”, (n. 160).

Returning to the Good Samaritan, he then underlines a secondary and generally neglected aspect of the parable: *“Even the Good Samaritan, for example, needed to have a nearby inn that could provide the help that he was personally unable to offer”*, (n. 165). In the parable, the alliance between the Samaritan and the innkeeper, a merchant, and the stipulation of a contract with two pieces of silver marked the beginning of trade relations in evangelical fraternity. An anonymous innkeeper boards the ark of fraternity with his two coins, and with him every businessman and financier who, by doing his job well and honestly, can offer to help and care for victims, and become a friend of the Samaritan and his neighbour. Working as an *entrepreneur* does not prevent that person from fulfilling his/her role as a human being.

In *Fratelli Tutti* there are some reflections on the market:

“The fragility of world systems in the face of the pandemic has demonstrated that not everything can be resolved by market freedom. It has also shown that, in addition to recovering a sound political life that is not subject to the dictates of finance, ‘we must put human dignity back at the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need’”, (n. 168, cf. n.142).

In fact, what the pandemic points out is that, wherever healthcare has been managed as an ordinary private good, the population and the States have suffered a lot, especially the poor. We are learning at a very high cost, that every human being is a common good, and that each person’s health or illness can have such serious repercussions on the health of the general public that we cannot think of

entrusting it principally to the market. If a poor person who falls ill does not receive proper treatment, his/her illness can become a *common threat*, which makes us immediately understand what the *common good* really means. There is an urgent need to rethink the relationship between the market, community, common goods and public goods.

“Never Again, War!”.

This Encyclical also marks the end of the doctrine of a “just war”. For years, we have been waiting for a clear, strong statement on this aspect of Christian doctrine that clashed too much with Francis and many of his Predecessors’ words on peace. It has come at last: “It is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘just war’. ‘Never again war!’”, (n. 258). And the note adds: “Saint Augustine [...], forged a concept of ‘just war’” that we no longer uphold in our own day.²⁴²

On the death penalty too Francis could not express clearer and stronger words than these:

“Saint John Paul II stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice. There can be no stepping back from this position. Today we state clearly that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible’, and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide”, (n. 263).

If God prevented, with his seal, that Cain, the first brother and the first fratricide, be killed because he was a murderer, then “if anyone kills Cain” is a proper and distinctive mark of every civilization of fraternity. The Koran says this with even greater force. In the Bible the two brothers do not speak; instead the Koran puts words on Abel’s lips. Perhaps looking his brother in the eye, Abel realizes that Cain is about to strike him and says: “Even if you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise my hand to kill you”, (The Holy Koran, al-Ma’idah: Sura 5,28). Abel, the first non-violent man, is the one who dies rather than become a murderer. Fraternity is meek like Abel, and like the many meek

people who have preferred to let themselves be killed in order not to become fratricidal, because, if the first murder was a fratricide, *every murder is a fratricide*.

The Encyclical concludes by acknowledging the *credits* Francis attributes to some great men (perhaps, the name of at least one woman would have been appropriate here):

“In these pages of reflection on universal fraternity, I felt inspired particularly by Saint Francis of Assisi, but also by others of our brothers and sisters who are not Catholics: Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi and many more. Yet, I would like to conclude by mentioning another person of deep faith who, drawing upon his intense experience of God, made a journey of transformation to the point of feeling a brother to all. I am speaking of Blessed Charles de Foucauld”, (n. 286).

Every discourse on fraternity is in the plural, every fraternal song is a symphony.

Custodians

Let us conclude with the Bible. Among the most beautiful biblical pages on fraternity, which tell us that the natural fraternity of blood can die and rise again as fraternity in the spirit, there are those Genesis devoted the cycle of Joseph. Joseph is not mentioned in the Bible as a patriarch, because Joseph is above all *the brother*, the one who taught us what biblical brotherhood means: “I am Joseph”, he said to his brothers, “Is my father still in good health? [...] I am your brother Joseph, whom you once sold on the road to Egypt”, (Gen 45:3-4). This is the culmination of the story of Joseph, sold by his older brothers when he was still a boy, who then became, as an adult, their salvation. Up to that meeting in Egypt and until he makes himself known to his brothers, Joseph was only the brother whom they envied because of his beautiful long-sleeved robe and for his dreams. He was a brother because he was the son of the same father. Now, he *becomes a brother once again* in a newfound fraternity, because he has forged a new bond in pain-love. The fraternity of “blood alone” has never saved anyone, on the contrary it has often been the cause of injustice, privileges, discrimination,

violence. Brothers and sisters only *remain* brothers and sisters for life if they also become friends, mothers, fathers, of each other. Brotherhood is like the dawn, it is “dew” (Ps 133[132]:3), but that sun does not retain half of its splendour at dawn if the blood does not become spirit, if we are not then reborn as new creatures in this spirit.

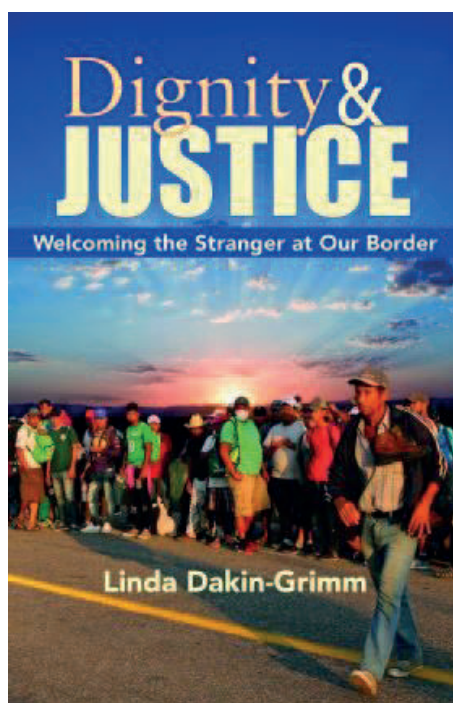
Through Joseph's tears, next to the word *brother* we can see the word *father*: “Is my father still in good health?”. Fraternity and paternity: in the entire cycle of Joseph, a great narrative on fraternity, father Jacob and mother Rachel are certainly not absent. They are a constant presence, essential co-protagonists in that story, though portrayed in the background to allow the metamorphosis of the siblings' brotherhood. Biblical fraternity, unlike that of the French Revolution, is not fraternity without or against paternity. Fatherhood-motherhood recounts history and a common destiny, it is the root and bond (*fides*) that binds us to each other throughout time. In biblical fraternity, space (which becomes a place) is not the enemy of time because, together, they link past to future. Unlike the great Greek myths on paternity (denied to Oedipus, awaited by Telemachus), biblical paternity is at the service of fraternity, because it recalls the Covenant and is the pledge for the fulfilment of the promise. If the Bible had sought to place the lost and re-found brotherhood of Joseph and his brothers at the heart of the history of salvation, then the miracle of a fratricide that is transformed into new fraternity is possible, it is part of the human repertoire. And it can be repeated anywhere and every day, even today.

Finally, another great biblical image is that of the sentinel: “Son of man, I have adopted you a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall warn them for me” (Ez 3:17). Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel feel called to be sentinels. Isaiah (chap. 21) uses the word *shomer/keeper* to say sentinel. *Shomer* was the word Cain used when, not answering God's question, (“Where is your brother Abel?”), he asked, “Am I my brother's

keeper?”. He thus declared he was not Abel's keeper (*shomer*). He had killed him *because* he was not a keeper (*cf.* Gen 4). Mutual guardianship is a name for fraternity/brotherhood. Wherever there is no sense of reciprocal guardianship, fratricide arrives sooner or later. In *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis repeats in many ways that, in human relationships there is no room for ethical indifference; that, if we do not choose fraternity we choose death.

The prophet, who is against Cain, guards Abel and enlarges the territory of fraternity to make it coincide with the entire city. And then, from that vantage point, he dutifully gazes beyond his city to survey the horizon of the fraternal land of all women and all men. A land he longs for, a land that calls. Pope Francis is a friend and brother of the biblical prophets, and with them he continues to watch over Abel, to try to save him, every day, from the action of Cain, his brother.

(Ref.: Francesco, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Lettera enciclica sulla fraternità e l'amicizia sociale*, pp. 3-21: “Guida alla lettura” di Luigino Bruni.)



(Gift from ORBIS BOOKS to SEDOS Library)

Woman in the New Testament

The Biographers of Jesus

We have four 'biographies' of Jesus and the picture they have presented of Jesus is historically fairly accurate. Based on what we find in their writings, we can confidently say that "Jesus was a reformer of patriarchal society, sometimes making suggestions that would have been considered radical in a Jewish context."¹ The evangelists were aware of this. Hence when they wrote their gospels they were guided by the liberal vision of Jesus. Even though what they say may be their own creation or that of the early communities for whom they were writing, it is not merely an invention from their imagination, with no foundation in history.

Though women did not usually figure in Jewish genealogies, Matthew mentions four women in his genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba (1:3,5-6). Matthew had a definite theological concern, because his genealogy of Jesus "is above all an artistically devised theological statement."² All the four women "showed initiative or played an important role in the plan of God."³ By mentioning the four women, Matthew prepares the Jewish - Christians "to expect the unexpected. At the beginning of the gospel they function as part of a theme that runs through the entire text: the tension between tradition and newness."⁴ He presents the community of Jesus as a community of equals (23:8-10): men and women, Jews and Gentiles, all are called to be Jesus' disciples.⁵ Part of this newness is precisely to give women equal dignity within the church. This will happen only when women are equally involved in the decision-

making processes, be it in matters of doctrine or discipline. Many will oppose this move in the name of tradition, but this is to be expected.

Luke's Infancy Narrative brings women and men in equal measure in the picture. Women act, and they talk. Matthew's version is dominated by men. True, he does mention five women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary, but they are all quiet. Matthew prepares us for the acceptance of the unexpected. Joseph, "the central character in Matthew's account of Jesus' birth,"⁶ knows that the child Mary is carrying is not his. He can disown her quietly or even get her stoned to death (Deut 22:25-27). He ignores his patriarchal right and accepts Mary as his spouse. Matthew declares him a just man (1:19), presenting him as open to the surprises our creative God has in store for us. Without being aware of it, Joseph sets the ball rolling: accepting the unexpected. Without realizing it, he gives us an example: we need to disown our 'rights' if we wish to work for an egalitarian society. Many of our 'rights' are our own constructions: the exploitative ideology of the dominant group. On the other hand Herod, the chief priests, and other leaders are disturbed when they are told that the king of the Jews has been born (2:2). They are the ones who gain from patriarchy and hierarchy. Herod pretends to be eager to visit Jesus. The chief priests and other leaders disappear from the scene. The wise men (*magoi*) from the East have two surprises: they do not find the future king of Israel in a palace but in an ordinary house (2:11), and they are told to return home by a new route (2:12). The Magi "originally referred to a caste of Persian priests with special claims to interpret dreams."⁷ In Matthew's Infancy Narrative, God

¹ (Notes 1-54 in Part I) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1 - 13*. Word Biblical Commentary: 33A. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995, p. 12.

² Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives*, 2nd. Ed Sheffield Academic Press (1990) 1995, p. 21.

³ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 33.

⁴ Rahab and Ruth are certainly Gentiles.

⁵ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 39.

⁶ Ibid., p.42.

⁷ Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," p. 143b.

communicates his wishes through dreams (1:20; 2:12,13,19,22). Thus, we may say that the wisdom of the Magi was precisely in their ability to know and accept God's will, however strange it may seem to them. They are open to the new possibilities, seeing in them the challenges God offers God's children, the God who is "active unobtrusively and ambiguously behind the scenes."⁸

Matthew (1:18-23) and Luke (1:34-35) tell us that Jesus was born from a virgin mother. I believe the claim of virginal birth shakes the very foundations of a patriarchal culture. In a patriarchal society, a woman finds her fulfilment in marriage and childbearing, that too understood primarily in terms of mothering a son. That is her greatest honour (Jn 2:1). The evangelists present to us a woman who attained the highest honour marked out for her in her society without depending on man. In and through her, God "has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts; he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree" (Lk 1:51-52). Mary proclaims to us that for women to find their highest fulfilment must be aware of their strength. She proclaims something more: humans attain their highest fulfilment, their highest honour, in submitting themselves to God, because for God nothing is impossible (Lk 1:37). Luke and John give a special place to women in their narrative. There seem to be some historical reasons for this.

Apparently, various 1st century churches struggled with the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and others about the new role's women could assume in the Christian community. This can be inferred from the fact that when the third and fourth evangelists set down their gospels in the last quarter of the first century they felt it important to stress the new roles of women and the equality of women with men as objects of God's grace and gracious endowments.⁹

Luke is the evangelist of women.¹⁰ In his infancy narratives besides Elizabeth and Anna, Mary is a very active figure. She does a lot of talking, and even recites a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. Her husband is totally silent. She is portrayed as the Ark of the Covenant—a thought that would sound blasphemous to traditional Jews.¹¹ A woman could never come anywhere near the Ark of the Covenant, much be portrayed as its symbol. In the Palestinian society of her time, "as a young girl, Mary would not normally have left her home without accompaniment—either to browse in her own hometown or (especially!) to travel some seventy miles to the hill country around Jerusalem. Until she entered the bridal chamber, a girl lived in seclusion in her home."¹² She had to present her husband virgin soil for his seed—even if he himself was not a virgin.

In the past we have heard many speak of Mary as a model of faith, obedience and humility. This sort of discourse has been very handy for patriarchs and hierarchs. We need to note that Mary does not accept what the angel tells her without raising a question. She does not blindly submit to the expectations of her community, but daringly goes out of her house and travels quite a distance to meet Elizabeth. She is deeply conscious of the wonders God has done for her, and says so quite audibly. She thus presents us a new approach to faith, obedience and humility. She is also a mighty prophet, proclaiming the new order that God is about to usher in. She proclaims her faith in that God who, on the one hand, has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden, exalted those of low degree; and filled the hungry with good things; and who, on the other hand, has scattered the proud, put down the mighty from their thrones, and sent away the rich empty (Lk 1:46-55).

⁸ Witherington, "Women: New Testament," p. 959b.

⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Gospel of Luke*, AB: 28 & 28A. New York: Doubleday, 1985, pp. 191-2.

¹⁰ Subhash Anand, "Mary: The Ark of the Covenant," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 77 (2013), pp. 269-91.

¹¹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT. Grand Rapids B. Eerdmans, 1997, pp. 94-5.

¹² "Fitzmyer, *Gospel of Luke*, p. 1061.

The Lucan concern for women is also noticeable in the life and ministry of the Lukan Jesus: he is keen to give equal importance to men and women. Luke begins with two annunciations, one to Zachary (1:5-22), and the other to Mary (1:26-38). After his birth Jesus is recognized by Simeon and Anna (2:25,36). Jesus was moved with compassion for the centurion whose servant was sick, and for the widow of Naim who lost her son (7:1-17). He told the widow of Naim not to weep for her son, but he himself wept over Jerusalem (7:13; 19:41). He was at home with a Pharisee and also with Martha and Mary (7:36; 10:38). He is praised by a woman who is taken up by his preaching (11:27). He healed a cripple woman and a man with dropsy on the Sabbath (13:10-17; 14:1-6). On his way to Calvary, he accepted support from Simon of Cyrene and compassion from the women of Jerusalem (23:26,28).

In his parables, the Lucan Jesus gives equal importance to women and men. He compared the Kingdom of God to a man sowing a seed, and to a woman putting some leaven in the dough (13:18-21). The latter parable is found only in Luke. When the end comes, there will be two men in one bed, and two women at one mill (17:35-36). In teaching us the need to persevere in prayer Jesus gives the example of a man who keeps on knocking on the door of his friend to get the bread he needs, and of a widow who kept on coming to a judge to get justice against her adversary (11:5-8; 18:1-8).

Jesus portrayed God as the shepherd who goes in search of his lost sheep, and also as a woman who sweeps her house to find her lost coin (15:3-10). On finding what was lost, both have a celebration. In describing the invitation to the celebration, Luke composes his text with great mastery. Both call their friends and neighbours: the man calls his male friends and male neighbours; the woman calls her female friends and neighbours. In the Greek text, "*tous philous kai tous geitonas... tas philas kai geitonas*," we have the article ("*tous*"), even though it could function for both the nouns. But *geitôn*

is common gender, and Luke wants to make sure the reader gets his point: the shepherd called his male neighbours, while the woman invites her woman friends. The two genders are represented equally in the parable.

A feminist reader may draw my attention to something that may escape a male reader and yet may not be without some significance. The man went in search of the lost sheep (*probaton*: neuter), while the woman in search of the lost coin (*drakhma*: feminine). There was a time when the drachma had a high purchasing power, "enough to buy a sheep, or the equivalent of day's wage. In the days of Nero, however, the *denarius* replaced the *drachma*, which equaled it."¹³ Nero had brought down value of *denarius* (Latin) from about eighteen cents to about eight cents.¹⁴ Luke wrote after the death of the Nero. In 20:24, he uses *dēnariōn* (Greek, neuter). Had he done so also in 15:8-9, not only would his text make more sense to his readers, but also bring out better the poverty of the woman, who lost the *drakhma*. Hence the use of a feminine noun may not be without some reason: the parable of the lost coin is totally peopled with females!¹⁵

The Johannine Jesus makes his first public manifestation urged by a woman, even though his hour had not yet arrived (2:4). Using water as a symbol, he had a long discourse with a Pharisee and with a Samaritan woman (3:1-21; 4:2-27). He presents the Samaritan woman as a missionary: many Samaritans believe because of her testimony (4:39). He defends the woman accused of adultery, subtly suggesting that his accusers were equally guilty of the same crime (8:7). He shatters the patriarchal pride of some of his hearers by telling them that they were illegitimate children (8:40). In urging his disciples to draw life from him, Jesus compares himself

¹³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich & Frederick W. Danker. University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 179a.

¹⁴ If Luke wanted to balance the two parables fully, he could have used *amnos* (masculine)—lamb—in place of *probaton*. The little lamb would also be symbolic of Luke's special concern for the weaker sections of his society.

¹⁵ O'Day, "The Gospel of John," p. 760.

to a vine and the disciples as its branches (Jn 15:1-7).

The metaphor of the vine suggests a radically non-hierarchical model for the church... no branch has pride of place; no branch can claim precedence or privilege over any other... There is neither status nor rank among the branches. Hierarchy among the branches is precluded, because all members grow out of the one central vine and are tended equally by the one gardener.¹⁶ Paul had explained this approach in his first letter to the Corinthians. One of the reasons for tensions within this community was that some were claiming to be superior to others because they thought that the gifts given to them were of a higher nature (12:1-31). He then tells them what really makes them great: love for one another. Without this gift all other gifts are useless (13:1-3). The Lord gives many gifts to this church “but the greatest of these is love” (1:13). It is precisely the characteristic of love that it discounts hierarchy. Within the Trinity, Who is Love itself and the source of love, there is the perfect communion precisely because there is no hierarchy.

All the four evangelists tell us that some women were witnesses to the crucifixion of Jesus. The synoptics tell us that they stood at some distance (Mt 27:55; Mk 15:40; Lk 23:49), While John says they were close to the cross of Jesus (19:25). The Twelve are nowhere in the picture.¹⁷ “As we see, in this most arduous test of faith and fidelity the women proved stronger than the apostles. In this moment of danger, those who love much succeed in overcoming their fear.”¹⁸ While there is “an almost total discrepancy” in the

accounts of Jesus’ resurrection,¹⁹ yet on one point there appears to be total agreement: women are the first witnesses of the Risen Lord (Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-10; Jn 20:1-18). It is they who are “the first ones to receive the angelic account of Jesus’ resurrection and commission to go and tell the male disciples of this event.”²⁰ This “means that women were welcomed into the innermost circle of his friends, something that indeed signaled a new shift.”²¹

This unanimity of the gospels points to a tradition that was so well known that the evangelists just could not ignore it. That tradition itself could not have been the construction of the early Christians, who were largely of Jewish origins. They would not have chosen women to be the first witnesses and messengers of Jesus’ resurrection, had it not been for some compelling historical fact. But as it so often happens, the male disciples, either due to their foolishness or their arrogance or to both, refused to believe those first witnesses just because they happened to be women (Mk 16:11, Lk 24:11). Consequently, when we have a list of the official witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection, women are not even mentioned (1 Cor 15:3-8). This is also because in the legal process women and slaves could not appear as witnesses.²² In like manner the Jewish Christians could not think of women as priests, because “no women ever held a place among the Israelite clergy.”²³ The exclusion of women from presiding at worship may imply the acceptance of a cultural patriarchal framework and not the consequence of sound theological reflection, much less of critical biblical exegesis.

¹⁶ It has been presumed by many that the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who was with the women near the cross of Jesus, was John, one of the twelve apostles. However, not all scholars are agreed on this (See Brown, *The Gospel according to St. John*, pp. xciii-xcviii). I too am not inclined to accept that John, the son of Zebedee, was the beloved disciple, who is presented as the author of the fourth Gospel, above all because, as modern exegetes note, “the developments of Christology and the realized eschatology of the Fourth Gospel are well beyond what would be likely for a Galilean fisherman” (Pheme Perkins, “The Gospel according to John”, *NIBC*, pp. 942-985, here p. 947a).

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), no. 15.

¹⁸ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 395.

¹⁹ Scholer, “Women”, p. 883b.

²⁰ Benedict XVI (in conversation with Peter Seewald), *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010, p. 160.

²¹ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd: 1961, p. 156.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 384.

²³ C.S. Keener, “Man and Woman,” in GF. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin & D.G Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993, pp. 583b-592b, here p. 583b.

The Pharisee from Tarsus²⁴

If we do not read the writings of Paul carefully we may get the impression that Paul too was a patriarchal thinker and an irreformable misogynist. “No NT writer has been more criticized for his allegedly negative portrayal of women than the apostle Paul.” He gives the impression that he still holds the Old Testament view about adultery: a married woman is always guilty of adultery if she is involved in an extramarital relation; but a married man can get away if his partner is not married.

Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress (Rom 7.2-3).

Paul says this to explain how a Christian belongs to Jesus, and ought to remain loyal to him. On the other hand, husband and wife have an equal right and obligation with regard to intercourse “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise, the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Cor 7.3-4). Thus, within the most intimate sphere of marriage, husband and wife are equal— not all patriarchs would concede this.²⁵ Paul even gives the unbelieving wife a privilege: if she wishes to continue living with her believing husband, he may not divorce her (v. 12).

In 1 Cor 11.3-16 we have the impression that Paul is too harsh and oppressive with regard to the way women should dress up for worship.²⁶ It was then believed that woman’s

hair was a distraction and even a source of temptation for men. Granted, it was men’s problem, but the society then laid down that when coming for worship women should cover their heads. Paul believes that during worship we need to help each other to enter an atmosphere of prayer. We can share Paul’s concern, though we may not agree with his solution or with the reasons given to back it. Paul also maintains that the story of Genesis is literally true: “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” (vv. 8-9). Though in principle, women may attend the community worship with heads uncovered; they’re so doing may bring about some division in the community, as all may-not be ready for such a move. Here some woman may even insist: “All things are lawful for me!” Paul would reply: “[I agree] but not all things are helpful... [hence] I will not be enslaved by anything... [because] not all things build up” (6:12; 10:23). Paul’s intention is not to limit women’s freedom as such. He believes that prophets are second only to apostles (12:28), and he accepts women prophesying in the church (11:5).

In Eph 5:22-33, the writer admonishes women to submit to their husbands.²⁷ Here we need to take the text in its totality. First, the husband is expected to love his wife as Jesus loved his Church: like Jesus he too should be prepared to lay down his life for his wife (v.25). The love Jesus has for his Church is liberative: Jesus sets her free from all bonds of oppression so “that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (v.27). Second, for the sake of his wife the husband should be prepared to give up all other human relations (v.31). Or to put it differently, a man is expected to love his

²⁴ Paul is the earliest written source about the traditions of Christian origins.

²⁵ This “is one of the most difficult passages in the entire letter... [It] is so problematic and employs much vocabulary that is not used elsewhere in Paul’s undisputed letters” that some think it is not authentic (Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SP: 7, Collegeville (Minn): Liturgical Press, 1999, p. 393).

²⁶ I have, on purpose, used ‘the writer’ and not ‘Paul’. Many modern scholars do not consider the Letter to the Ephesians and the

Letter to the Colossians authentically Pauline. See Maurya P. Horgan, “The Letter to the Colossians”, *NJBC*, pp. 876-882, here p. 877b; Paul J. Kobelski, “The Letter to the Ephesians”, *Ibid.*, pp. 883-890, here pp. 883b-884a.

²⁷ Paul uses *diakonos*, a common gender term, as *diakonissa* would emerge only in the Patristic period. See Joseph J. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB: 6, New York: Doubleday, 1993, p. 731.

wife more than all his other relatives. It is within this frame of love that the submission expected of women has to be understood. Third, on her part, a woman must submit to her husband 'as to the Lord' (v.22), 'and as is fitting in the Lord' (Col 3:18). These qualifying words are significant: what is expected of a wife is not servile obedience but religious respect.

In discussing Paul's attitude towards women and their role in the Church, Rom 16.1-16 is a very significant text. He begins by naming Phoebe, who is a deaconess (*diakonos*, v. 1) and patroness (*prostatis*, v.2) of many.²⁸ The latter is not merely a polite compliment, but indicates "a person of prominence in the ancient Greco-Roman world."²⁹ Paul acknowledges his indebtedness to her. He then mentions seven women and five men "as active in the service of the gospel."³⁰ This fact "may indicate his sensitivity to the opposition women undoubtedly faced for their ministry in some quarters."³¹ Among the women mentioned, we have Junias, who was a person "of note among the apostles" (v.7). The church Fathers took this name to mean a woman. Starting from the 13th century, scholars began to propose that it indicated a male.³² This "proposal rests on the assumption that a woman could not be an apostle, rather than on any evidence inherent in the text itself."³³ Paul names his female fellow-workers or women who lead the houses churches in other texts too (Phil 4:2-3; Col4:15; 2Tim4:21; Phlm 2).

There are two texts that give the impression that Paul curtails the ministry of women in the church. He even tells them to be silent in the churches, and if they have some questions to ask they should do so through their husbands (1 Cor 14:33-35). Some scholars think that these lines are taken from a letter addressed to Paul, to which he is responding in vv. 36f. Others take them as an interpolation. Some others maintain that they

are a digression dealing with a specific problem, and Paul "was fond of digressions."³⁴ We find a similar admonition to women in 1 Tim 2:9-14: they are expected to be submissive and quiet in the church; and they will find salvation through child-bearing. Paul seems to have forgotten what he wrote elsewhere: a virgin lives totally for the Lord (1 Cor 7:34). Here it should also be noted that the Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) are not considered authentically Pauline by many.³⁵

Before we come to our final judgement about Paul's thinking about the place of women within the Christian community, we need to keep some things in mind. First, "Paul's instructions specifically address institutions as they existed in Paul's day."³⁶ Hence when it comes to questions regarding the behaviour of Christians, we need to keep in mind the situation that prompted him to write, and discern what practical guidelines flow from the core message of Jesus, and what apply to a particular context, a context governed by its own socio-cultural setup. Second, the passages cited above are either of doubtful authenticity or from Deutero-Pauline letters. Some modern scholars think that the disciples of Paul, who authored these texts, have "increasingly subordinated women's roles to fit the standards of their culture."³⁷ Third, it is possible that in the situation Paul had in mind, most of the women disciples were not educated. The situation is so different today. Fourth, Paul not only admits the possibility of women remaining unmarried, but even encourages them to do so (1 Cor 7:7-8,25-26). We can see the radicality of this approach when we keep in mind that Jewish girls married "shortly after the onset of menstruation."³⁸ They had no say in this matter. Paul is implicitly saying that the worth of persons is

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 734.

³⁰ Keener, "Man and Woman", p. 589b.

³¹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, pp. 737-738.

³² Keener, "Man and Woman", p. 589b.

³³ Ibid., pp. 590.

³⁴ See Benjamin Fiore, S.J., *The Pastoral Epistles*, SP: 12, Collegeville (Minn): Liturgical Press, 2007, pp. 15-18.

³⁵ Keener, "Man and Woman", p. 589a.a.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 587b

³⁷ C. C. Kroeger, "Women in Greco-Roman World and Judaism", in Craig A. Evans & Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, Downers Grove (Ill): InterVarsity Press, 2000, pp. 1276a-1280b, here p. 1277b.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 589a.

determined not by some social setup, much less by biological fertility, but by their inner disposition—to receive and live in love: the highest gift given by God (1 Cor 13:13). Fifth, by making circumcision irrelevant Paul states the fundamental equality of men and women within the community of Jesus, as both are equally able to keep God's commandments (1 Cor 7:19); as both are equally able to express their faith through love (Gal 5:6). Men and women equally carry the mark of the covenant sealed by death and resurrection of Jesus (Gal 6:17). This is the true circumcision (Rom 2:29). Sixth, in the time of Paul—as also in our days, “teaching roles naturally would fall on those who could read and speak well. Nearly all our Jewish sources suggest that these roles were, with rare exceptions, limited to men.”³⁹ This is understandable because in the Palestinian Jewish families of the New Testament era, “girls were afforded limited opportunities for education. They were schooled by their mothers in the household arts and in those parts of the law that dealt with purity issues and the responsibilities of women.”⁴⁰ Thus most of them were not able to read and write. The situation was a little more liberal in the Diaspora communities. Seventh, Paul has many favourable comments to make about women, some of whom he cherishes as his co-workers. Here again he is far ahead of his times. In those days even in matters of religion women could be ignored. “Attendance at Jewish rites was allowed to women but not particularly encouraged, while men were carefully instructed from childhood in the faith of Israel and expected to participate in the services.”⁴¹

Eighth, in Gal 3:28-29, Paul gives us a hermeneutical norm that should guide us to interpret whatever he says about women elsewhere in his writings: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male

nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The “baptismal formula reflected” here,⁴² is not merely a statement of Paul. The pairs we find here—Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female—“were originally formulated in a baptismal liturgy of the early church.”⁴³ We have already seen that circumcision was *the* mark of belonging to the Covenant People. Through our Baptism we put on Christ (3:27). Each one of us can say with Paul: “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (6:17). As this is enough “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love” (5:6). It is for this reason that all distinctions are subservient to the law of love. In the First Covenant circumcision was very important. This was a very special reason for men to claim a priority over women. Now this claim is no longer valid.

The reason why circumcision does not count is because in Jesus we are a new creation: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (6:15). Now Christ lives in us (2:20). We acquire “a new identity that lies beyond ethnic, social and sexual distinctions.”⁴⁴ In the first creation woman and man needed each other to overcome their loneliness through marriage. “Now the answer to loneliness is not marriage, but rather the new-creational community that God is calling into being in Christ, the church marked by mutual love, as it is led by the Spirit of Christ.”⁴⁵ What Paul was trying to tell the Galatians and all of us was that for our God it does not matter whether we are males or females. He insists that in the new community gathered by Jesus, we are all equal, “all one in Christ Jesus.” Hence, we can safely conclude that Paul can be “ranked among the most progressive of ancient writers.”⁴⁶

³⁹ Ibid., p. 1276b.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 1279a.

⁴¹ Scholer, “Women”, 886a.

⁴² Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41, Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990, p. 155.

⁴³ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, AB: 33A, New York: Doubleday, 1997, p. 374.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 381.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 592a.

⁴⁶ We are not sure who wrote this letter, but “the author clearly was not Paul” (William L. Lane, “Hebrews”, in Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its*

Other New Testament Texts

There are still three texts that need our attention. We can oppress people by what we say and do or by our refusal to speak and act when we should. We have an instance of patriarchal oppression through silence in the Letter to the Hebrews.⁴⁷ The author gives us a list of Old Testament figures whom he considers as models of faith. One name evokes an event in the Book of Judges. Deborah calls Barak and tells him that the Lord commands him to fight the Canaanites who are oppressing the Israelites. He agrees to go to war against the Canaanites only if she accompanies him. She agrees but tells him that even if he does go to fight, the road which he will take will not lead him to glory. Sisera, the leader of the enemies, is killed by a woman Jael (Judg 4:6-21). Yet only Barak is remembered among the great believers of the Old Testament (Heb 11:32). Deborah and Jael are conveniently forgotten. So too, Judith, Esther and Ruth are not mentioned. We have one woman, Sara the wife of Abraham, figuring in the list. Her faith enabled her to fulfil the role assigned to her by patriarchy: she bore a son for her husband (v. 11). She is mentioned a few times more in the New Testament, but once again from a patriarchal perspective. Her barrenness did not prevent Abraham from trusting in the Lord (Rom 4:19; 9:9). She is a model wife, obedient to her husband (1 Pet 3:6).

The second passage is from the First Letter of Peter. The writer tells women that they should be submissive to their husbands. This may even bring about their conversion if they have not yet accepted baptism. He tries to give an added reason: they are children of Sarah, who was submissive to Abraham, whom she addressed as her lord. The letter tells the readers that a humble and quiet spirit is their real ornament, and that is very precious in God's sight (3:1-2, 4-6). The writer is quite patriarchal in his thinking, wanting wives to be submissive to their

husbands, and trying to justify his position with some pious reasoning—a tactic so commonly followed by oppressive religious leaders. Granting that “there is nothing distinctly *feminine* about a ‘humble and quiet spirit’,”⁴⁸ the context in which this is presented as an ideal will make non-patriarchal readers uncomfortable. The patriarchal mindset of the author is also evident from the fact that he considers women the weaker sex (3:7). “The notion that women are ‘weak,’ or ‘weaker’ than men, was a common-place in the ancient world.”⁴⁹ Educated women today would resent men trying to be protective towards them. They believe they can do equally well what men think they can.⁵⁰ Christians are called to be critical towards ideas that shape their society.⁵¹ Wrong ideas generate unhealthy attitudes and lead to unethical behaviour. “Women have always been regarded as the weaker sex who had been and who continue to be trampled upon. This must change.”⁵² We are tempted to be violent and unfair towards people whom we consider weak and incapable of confronting us.

The third text found in the Book of Revelation disturbs me a lot of even legitimate sexual expression and experience seems to be rejected. The narrator tells us that he saw a crowd of men who bore the name of the Father of the Lamb on their

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 169.

⁴⁹ Let me give just one example: “Today’s women have achieved a goal that social commentators have inveighed against for centuries: economic independence.” Sandra Tsing Loh, “The Weaker Sex”, *The Atlantic*, October 2012. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/10/the-weaker-sex/309094/>; a.o. 07-31-2013.

⁵⁰ Here we can learn from Mahatma Gandhi. He is reported to have said: “To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man’s injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man’s superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?” (<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/204536-to-call-woman-the-weaker-sex-is-a-libel-it>; a.o. 07-31-2013.)

⁵¹ Jennifer Dkhar, “Women are not the weaker sex”, *The Shillong Times*, 9 March 2013, <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2013/03/09/women-are-not-the-weaker-sex/>; a.o. 07-31-2013.

⁵² “Jean-Louis D’aragon, “The Apocalypse”, JBC, vol. 2, pp. 467-493, here p. 484b.

Development, Downers Grove (111.): InterVarsity Press, 1997, pp. 443a-458b, here p. 444a.

⁴⁷ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC: 49, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988, p. 162.

foreheads. An unseen voice informs him that these men are virgins because they have not defiled (*melynô*) themselves with women. Therefore, they are the first fruits for God and the Lamb (14.4). Some commentators try to get out of the problem by saying that, following the Old Testament, the text is using the word *Parthenos* (virgin) as “a metaphor for fidelity to God.”⁵³ Three comments need to be made here. First, even if we are dealing with metaphorical language, we need to remember that so often our words and images tell people more than what we say. They reveal our unarticulated attitudes. Second, the writer could have achieved his purpose by simply stating that the crowd the visionary saw consisted of virgins, without adding that they had not defiled themselves with women. Third, by saying that they had not defiled themselves with women, the author gives the impression that the people who bore the name of the Father were all men and that women were not counted among the first fruits for God and for the Lamb.

Other scholars think that the text “deals with *ritualpurity*.”⁵⁴ This explanation could have been accepted were one to consider the Book of Revelation as a Jewish text, given the fact that it has “strong ties to the Jewish Scriptures.”⁵⁵ It is, however, a part of the Christian canon. Were we to accept the above explanation, then the writer had not really understood Jesus, who consistently disregarded all rules concerning ritual purity. I do not think that ritual concerns are so all-pervasive. Another possibility is that “this characterization of an ideal group reflected and reinforced tendencies toward the practice of sexual continence.”⁵⁶ This explanation may be more acceptable, keeping in mind that some in the third century were uncomfortable with the Book of Revelation '

because it was “a favourite text of the Montanists.”⁵⁷ Montanism was “a mid- to late-second-century apocalyptic and charismatic movement” that advocated “extreme asceticism.”⁵⁸

Even though the Old Testament is deeply patriarchal in its religious and social outlook, sexuality was seen as a gift of God, as a blessing. There was no place for celibacy in this culture. Jeremiah was the only Old Testament person who was asked not to marry, at least not in his country: “You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place” (Jer 16:2). Here it was not because celibacy was a value in itself or sex was to be avoided. His remaining single was meant to be a parable in action: his people are heading for a doom (w.3-4). The obligation to marry and care for their family limited the options women had. At the same time, we have in the Old Testament three books that bear the name of women: Judith, Ruth and Esther. They walked beyond the patriarchal boundaries and created history. But patriarchy dies hard. These great women are almost forgotten by the succeeding generations.

By calling men and women to be eunuchs for God’s kingdom, Jesus gives us a possibility that takes us much beyond our biological productivity. The way he went about showed that he treated women as his equals and enjoyed their company. He was once willing to learn from a woman who was not even a Jew. He loved children. He enjoyed parties. The love of husband and wife is a dim reflection of the love Jesus has for his church. The New Testament was composed at a time when even educated Jews believed that women were to be subject to their husbands in all matters. Josephus Flavius, an elder contemporary of Jesus, believed that thus “says the Scripture, ‘A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.’ Let her, therefore, be obedient to him; not so that he should abuse her, but that she may

⁵³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, WBC: 52B, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998, p. 810; emphasis in the original.

⁵⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation, Book of”, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, pp. 694b-708a, here p. 695a

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1010a.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 695a.

⁵⁷ “Montanism”, Richard P. McBrien (ed.), *HEC*, p. 890b.

⁵⁸ Josephus Flavius, *Contra Apion* 2.25
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2849/pg2849.txt>; a.o 31-07-2013. The text quoted by him is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament.

acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God hath given the authority to the husband.”⁵⁹

God refuses to follow these norms. He chose humble women to be the *first witnesses* of the greatest event in salvation history: Jesus’ resurrection. He also made them the *first messengers* of the Good News. The New Testament community has its origin in their apostolic witness. “One can say that this fulfilled the words of the Prophet: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy’ (Joel 3:1).”⁶⁰ Speaking about Mary Magdalene in his *De vita beatae Mariae Magdalenae*, Rabanus Maurus (780-856) said that Jesus sent Mary Magdalene as an apostle unto the apostles (“*ad apostolos apostolam*”). In his commentary on the gospel of John, Thomas Aquinas said that she was the apostle of the apostles (“*apoltolorum apostola*”):⁶¹ In the community of Jesus women and men are equal. They equally share in the mission and ministry of Jesus.

People in power positions will not easily cede power to others. The revolutionary movement set in motion by prophets slowly gets also blunted as the establishment succeeds in domesticating it. This happened to the church of Jesus. Even Paul appears to be somehow governed by patriarchy: he ignores women in his list of the witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. Given the ambiguity of the New Testament, the old patriarchal mindset slowly returns, and a false asceticism is idealized. Virginity is seen as better than married life. This thinking was also fuelled by the belief that the end was near at hand. This negative tendency prepares the way for the return of full-blown patriarchy in the church. Many Christian writers for centuries will give the impression that sexual fulfilment is at the most a concession, and women are second class citizens.

Before I conclude I wish to make two comments. First, our reading of the New

Testament must be holistic. We need to hold together the tension it presents: No doubt, men dominate the narrative, but they do not have an exclusive role. Also a person may figure little in a narrative, but may have a much greater say in shaping that narrative. We do hear Paul boasting of all that he did for the gospel (2 Cor 11:1-12:10). We come across a woman, who “occupied a position of poverty and powerlessness in her society,”⁶² and yet who makes an even greater claim. She is deeply conscious that generations to come will call her blessed, because God has done marvels for her. We have another woman who prepared Jesus for his burial; Jesus himself assures us that her memory will be part of the Gospel (Mk 14:9). Jesus had very good reasons for making that claim on her behalf.

The woman’s insight about Jesus and her love for him stand in sharp contrast to the attitude of the chief priests and elders... and to the attitude of Judas... She is also contrasted with Jesus’ own disciples who see her action as a waste of money that could be given to the poor. Only Jesus sees the timeliness [and the timelessness] of her action as preparation for his burial.⁶³

⁶² Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 364.

⁶³ On 22 and 23 March 2014, I was in Jharsaguda (Orissa) to help out in a seminar: “Paradigm Shift in Vatican II; Implications for Women.” There were more than eighty participants, mostly women. Almost all of them were natives of Orissa. On the 23rd (Sunday) the women wanted to act out the gospel (Jesus and the Samaritan Woman) during Mass. I have always seen the woman as having a loose character. The women actors came out with their own interpretation. When Jesus accused the woman of having five husbands, she corrected him: “No, not five but seven!” Then seven women, carrying placards, walked to the stage in front of the altar. The Samaritan was not a loose woman, going from lover to lover. She was the victim of exploitation, and she went from man to man for shelter, only to be exploited again. The seven placards explained her plight. 1. Her parents were poor and unable to provide her dowry. They married her to a lame man. This guy was a loner. He wanted the woman in bed not only at night but also during the day. She had to do all the house work by herself. 2. She ran away and the guy with whom she took shelter wanted her to engage in unnatural sex. 3. The next man was running a brothel together with his wife. 4. The fourth man was an alcoholic. He came home drunk and beat her. 5. Then she fell in the hands of a man distilling liquor on the quiet. She was forced to carry it after nightfall to his clients. On two occasions she was accosted by the police who told her either to give them money or do what they wanted—*intelligenti pauca*. 6. Thereafter an elderly couple got her married to their son. He was impotent and wanted to hide his limitation by trying to get her pregnant through some relative of his. 7. The man with whom she was living now was twice her age! This interpretation was an eye-opener for me. Johannine scholars may not quite approve this interpretation, but they will surely appreciate fact that the women

⁵⁹ John Paul II. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, endnote 38.

⁶¹ Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, p. 42

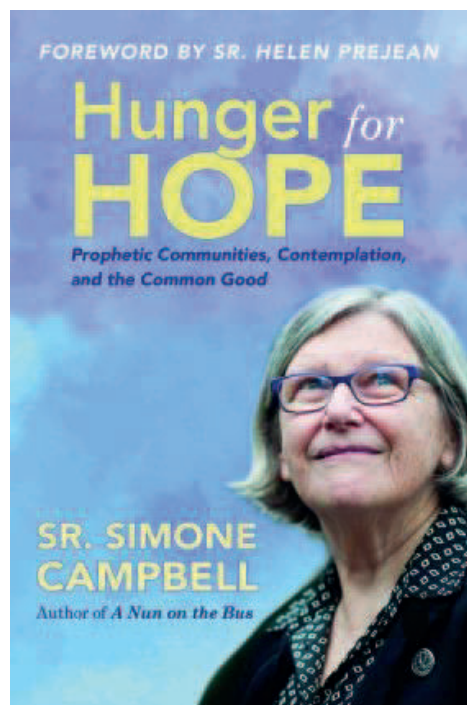
Yes, her action was timeless, because only people who see beyond the present can truly wish to be pilgrims. That is the only way we can be the church of Jesus.

Mary, the mother of Jesus and the nameless Samaritan woman cannot be ignored: with their feminine intuitive sense they saw the future. They will continue to remind us that in Jesus God made patriarchy stand on its head. For too long a time men have called the shots. They have determined what Scripture means. They have formulated the dogmas that have to be accepted without question. They have formulated laws that are meant to guide people, but not without advantage to themselves. It is time we allow women to talk more. It is time we men learn to listen.⁶⁴ This is Important because “from the beginning of Christ’s mission, women show to him and to his mystery a special sensitivity which is characteristic of their femininity.”⁶⁵ By listening to women we will understand Jesus more deeply. Then we will intuit better the tomorrow God wants to give us today. Then we will be pilgrims, constantly crossing narrow boundaries we have created for ourselves.

Second, however strong patriarchy may become, it cannot suppress history. We believe that God’s salvific revelation is through an event within history. “Once we forget the divine presence in that history and our lives, we may be merely manipulating concepts in our minds.”⁶⁶ I am aware it is not possible to know the full history of Jesus who lived two thousand years ago. But we know enough about his life and teaching to provide us the guidance we need in understanding the New Testament. Thus the Jesus of 1 provides us a canon within a canon. The Jesus of history provides us a canon within a canon. The Jesus of history subverts all our ideas and ideologies. Given the different situations of the early

communities, there were bound to be differences in what was addressed to them. Hence within the New Testament while plurality is legitimate, every claim must be tested for legitimacy by being referred back to the historical phenomenon of the real Jesus of Nazareth... otherwise Jesus becomes a mere receptacle for our own predilections, an arbitrary cipher that we manipulate.

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chose the number 'seven'. The Samaritan woman's cup of sorrow was brimming over.

⁶⁴ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 16.

⁶⁵ Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity*, New York: Paulist press, 1999, p. 200.

⁶⁶ John P. Meier, *The Mission of Christ and His Church: Studies in Christology and Ecclesiology*, Wilmington (Delaware): Michael Glazier, 1990, p. 41.

La Storia Di Rut E Noemi

La Santità Vissuta nella Goia e nell'Amore

1. Israele chiamato a diventare un popolo santo

“La ricchezza del concetto di santità nell’AT deriva dal fatto che essa è prospettata in relazione alla sua stessa sorgente, Dio, dal quale scaturisce ogni santità”¹. Dio viene proclamato santo da epoca molto antica. La prima menzione di questo uso si trova nel cantico di Mosè, dove la santità di Dio è collegata allo straordinario evento di salvezza che fu il passaggio del mar Rosso (*Es* 15, 1-21). La santità di Dio si manifesta anche nella sua illimitata capacità di amare e di perdonare, come attesta un brano di Osea: “Non darò sfogo all’ardore della mia ira, non tornerò a distruggere Èfraim, perché sono Dio e non uomo; sono il Santo in mezzo a te e non verrò nella mia ira” (*Os* 11,9). Il parallelismo evidenzia che il termine santo viene applicato a Dio come attributo proprio della sua trascendenza e divinità (*Os* 12,1 ; *Ab* 3, 3). Dio può giurare per la sua santità, cioè per se stesso (*Am* 4, 2), e manifestarsi come colui che è santo (*Lv* 11,44:19, 2)².

Nel libro di Isaia si trova una prospettiva di grande rilevanza per quanto riguarda la santità di Dio. Il “Santo, santo, santo” (*Is* 6, 3a) che il profeta ascolta proclamato dai serafini in mezzo a una grandiosa teofania evidenzia una dimensione intima dell’essere di Dio, la sua maestosità, come chiarifica il versetto parallelo: “Tutta la terra è piena della sua gloria” (*Is* 6, 3b). Quando gli angeli che stanno intorno al trono esclamano l’uno

all’altro “santo, santo, santo”, esprimono con forza e passione la verità della santità suprema di Dio, quella caratteristica essenziale che esprime la Sua natura imponente e maestosa. Sebbene Isaia fosse un profeta di Dio e un uomo giusto, la sua reazione alla visione della santità di Dio fu di temere per la propria vita (*Is* 6, 5). Se persino gli angeli al cospetto di Dio, esclamando “Santo, santo, santo è il Signore degli eserciti”, si coprivano il volto e i piedi con quattro delle loro ali, che sarebbe stato di lui? Coprirsi il volto e i piedi denota reverenza e timore provocati dal trovarsi improvvisamente davanti a Dio (*Es* 3, 4-5). I serafini stavano eretti, coperti, come per occultarsi il più possibile, in un atto di riconoscimento della propria indegnità al cospetto dell’Onnipotente.

La dimensione salvifica della santità di Dio è particolarmente sottolineata dal profeta Ezechiele (36,16-36) all’Interno del quadro della storia della salvezza nella quale avranno il posto anche i pagani (*Is* 61, 5). Israele ha ottenuto la promessa del Signore di diventare una nazione santa, come ricorda il ritornello che articola il codice di santità: “Siate santi, perché io, il Signore, Dio vostro, sono santo” (*Lv* 19, 2: Cfr. 20, 7). La chiamata a diventare un popolo santo richiedeva una corrispondenza decisa alla proposta divina. Condizione per diventare e rimanere popolo santo era ascoltare la voce del Signore e osservare la sua alleanza, cioè obbedire ai precetti della legge, fondati sul comandamento dell’amore del Signore, unico vero Dio (*Dt* 6, 4-8). La proposta della partecipazione nella santità di Dio, si apre anche ai pagani (*Is* 61, 5) come si deduce da quanto avvenne tra la moabita Rut e Noemi.

1 Michelangelo TÁbet, “Santità”, in *Temi teologici della Bibbia*, a cura di R. PENNA, G. PEREGO, G. RAVASI, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 2010, 1338.

2 *Ibidem*, 1339

2. La storia di Rut e Noemi

Il libro di Rut rievoca una patetica storia familiare del tempo dei Giudici (1200-1025 a. C.), dalla quale, oltre a delicati sentimenti umani, emergono alcuni elementi religiosi di grande importanza. Il ritorno di Israele dall'esilio in Babilonia, per esempio, contribuì a dare un ulteriore significato al concetto della partecipazione dello straniero nella storia della salvezza del popolo eletto Israele³. La storia presentata nel libro di Rut è dominata da due figure femminili. La prima è Noemi, costretta ad abbandonare il paese nativo per trasferirsi con il marito Elimèlech e i figli Maclon e Chilion in terra di Moab a causa di una carestia che aveva colpito la regione di Betlemme (*Rt* 1, 1 ; Cfr. *Gen* 12,10: 26, 1: 42, 1)⁴. La seconda è Rut, una donna straniera che sposa un parente del marito di Noemi⁵. Dopo alcuni anni Noemi resta vedova e senza figli; "avendo sentito dire che il Signore aveva visitato il suo popolo dandogli del pane" decide di tornare "nel paese di Giuda" accompagnata dalle nuore Orpa e Rut (*Rt* 1, 16-22). Noemi vorrebbe rimandarle nella loro terra, ma Rut non solo non abbandona la suocera (*Rt* 2,11), ma assicura la sopravvivenza della famiglia accettando di sposare Booz. Ella entra, così, nella storia del popolo di Israele; popolo santo e consacrato a Dio, un evento che le permette di far parte di coloro cui è stata promessa la salvezza. In questo modo la storia di Rut diventa una risposta per coloro che tra gli Israeliti rifiutavano di mescolarsi con i popoli stranieri e le loro divinità. Israele deve capire che, per ottenere la salvezza ha bisogno degli stranieri e, per di più, delle donne.

La crisi dei matrimoni misti in Israele risale alla metà del V sec. a. C. quando il popolo di Giuda tornò dall'esilio babilonese. Non si sa come si comportarono gli Israeliti durante il

periodo babilonese: forse i più fedeli tra i deportati si astennero dai matrimoni misti, mentre coloro che erano rimasti in Giudea fecero probabilmente il contrario, sia per la difficoltà di trovare donne israelite, sia per interessi economici e di convivenza (*MI* 2, 11 ; *Ne* 6, 18). Questo causò una nuova consapevolezza della necessità dei matrimoni tra Israeliti. Coloro che avevano contratto matrimoni pericolosi per il monoteismo furono costretti a divorziare dalle donne straniere. Sotto la spinta delle nuove circostanze, Esdra e Neemia richiamarono il popolo all'endogamia. Neemia, dopo aver ricoperto per tredici anni la carica di governatore della Galilea (445-432 a. C.), sarebbe ritornato alla corte achemenide. In una successiva visita a Gerusalemme, egli avrebbe corretto gli abusi insorti fra la gente, durante la propria assenza, nel tempio di Gerusalemme. Fra i diversi provvedimenti emanati dovevano rientrare anche quelli contrari ai matrimoni misti (*Ne* 13, 23-27). La funzione di Neemia si avvicina a quella svolta dal re nella ricostruzione della città; nell'indizione di una riforma religiosa e nell'attenzione posta alla legge. Si deve anche sottolineare il diritto che aveva il potere civile di legiferare in materia religiosa.

Esdra e Neemia ribadivano la fedeltà alle norme della legge, unendo alla motivazione religiosa anche una sottolineatura nazionalistica: "(...) così hanno profanato la stirpe santa con le popolazioni locali (...)" (*Esd* 9, 2). Nella soluzione drastica richiesta da Esdra: ripudio delle mogli straniere, e soprattutto in quella, più diplomatica, di Neemia, dovuta con ogni probabilità al fallimento della prima, non ci sono elementi per affermare che i matrimoni misti di cui si parla, oltre che proibiti, fossero considerati anche invalidi⁶.

3 Il libro di Rut fu scritto nel V-IV sec. a. C.

4 Il nome ebraico Betlemme significa "casa del pane" (*Rt* 1, 6). Cfr. L. Monloubou e F. M. Du Buit, "Moabiti", in *Dizionario biblico storico critico*, Borla, Roma 1987, 650.

5 I moabiti erano esclusi dalla comunità israelita per conflitti accaduti nel passato (*Dt* 23, 3-4).

6 Questi episodi hanno un aspetto doloroso, perché molti di questi matrimoni erano certamente stati celebrati per una scelta di amore vero. Le donne che erano state scelte, non avevano colpa per il fatto di appartenere ad altri popoli, né potevano essere accusate di cattive azioni, se erano rimaste fedeli alle convinzioni religiose dei loro padri. Certamente, però, avevano agito male quegli Ebrei che avevano contratto matrimonio violando le proprie leggi; si erano lasciati

Nel libro del Deuteronomio, la legge si occupa direttamente di questa possibilità e la giudica in modo negativo. Non ci dovevano essere alleanze con i popoli in mezzo ai quali vivevano gli Ebrei, e tanto meno matrimoni con loro: “Non ti impareggerai con loro, non darai le tue figlie ai loro figli e non prenderai le loro figlie per i tuoi figli, perché allontanerebbero i tuoi figli dal seguire me, per fargli servire a dei stranieri” (Dt 7, 3-4). La condanna contro gli Ammoniti e i Moabiti stabiliva che essi non sarebbero mai entrati a far parte della comunità del Signore, fino alla decima generazione (Dt 23, 4). Gli antichi avevano un atteggiamento non sempre favorevole verso gli stranieri, perché essi avevano una religione diversa che poteva sedurre il popolo eletto (Dt 20, 17) e potevano in questo senso, essere dei nemici⁷.

Nei tempi del ritorno del popolo eletto dall'esilio babilonese, questa norma era diventata molto più severa che in passato. Ma la comunità ritornata dall'esilio babilonese, ha dovuto aprirsi, pur nella riscoperta di una fedeltà a Dio, nella propria identità religiosa e nazionale, a un'accoglienza verso gruppi marginali perché ha riconosciuto di essere stata essa stessa, nella propria storia, un gruppo marginale salvato e amato da Dio⁸.



Orpah went to her family. Ruth wanted to go to Bethlehem with Naomi. She loved Naomi. She wanted to live where Naomi lived. She wanted to be with Naomi always. Ruth 1:14-17

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/old-testament-stories/chapter-24-ruth-and-naomi>

3. L'amore di Rut per Noemi è un modello per il popolo di Israele

Rut, dopo essere arrivata a Betlemme con la suocera Noemi, cominciò a fare la spigolatrice. Questa usanza era permessa dalla legge (Dt 24, 19-21), che imponeva ai proprietari di lasciare ai poveri le spighe cadute. La provvidenza la condusse nel campo di Booz, il quale la prese a benvolere e non solamente l'autorizzò a spigolare, ma diede ordine ai mietitori di lasciare sul campo manelli di spighe (Rt 2, 10-12). Così una sera Rut tornò a casa “con un'efa di orzo e lo mostrò alla suocera”. Essa restò a spigolare nei campi di Booz per tutta la mietitura dell'orzo e del frumento.

Col tempo Booz sposò Rut⁹ e dalla felice unione nacque un figlio a cui fu posto il nome di Obed, padre di Iesse, che a sua volta sarà padre di Davide (Rt 4,16) dalla cui discendenza nacque il Messia, che sarebbe venuto per dare salvezza a Israele. Rut, dopo aver sposato Booz e accettato la religione del marito, divenne una proselita, per questo l'autore del libro può dichiararla addirittura antenata di Davide.

influenzare dalle loro spose e, invece di trasmettere ad esse il messaggio dell'alleanza stabilita da Dio con il suo popolo, avevano tradito la fede nel Signore. Cfr. G. Tonucci, “Le donne straniere cacciate via”, in *Messaggio della Santa Casa*, Loreto (Maggio 2012) 165s.

⁷ Cfr. J. H. Friedrich, “Xenos”, in *Dizionario Esetico del Nuovo Testamento*, a cura di H. Balz e G. Schneider, vol. II, Paideia Editrice, Brescia 2004, 531-532.

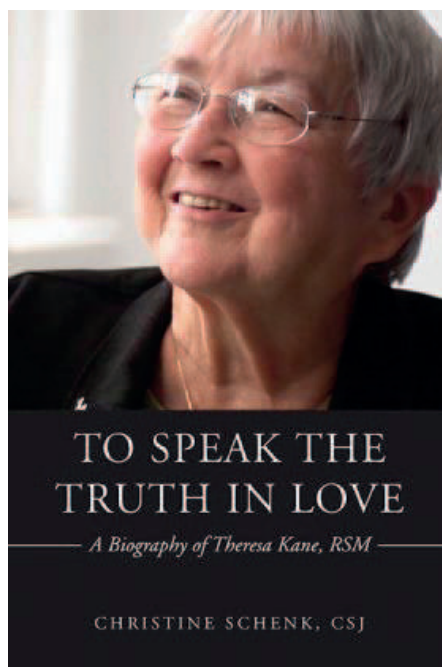
⁸ Dal punto di vista sociale, gli stranieri residenti erano persone libere, ma si comportavano come se fossero schiavi. Gli stranieri mantenevano la loro libertà, potevano stabilirsi nella comunità, ma non avevano tutti diritti politici.

⁹ Noemi rinuncia al diritto del levirato (Dt 25, 5-10) e consiglia Rut di indurre Booz a prenderla in moglie (Rt 3,1). Secondo la legge, il nome di “matrimonio leviratico” si riserva al matrimonio tra la vedova senza figli e suo cognato, fratello del marito defunto (Dt 25, 5-10). La legge determina esplicitamente gli obblighi dei familiari del defunto. Alla vedova si proibisce di sposarsi con persone estranee alla famiglia, per non rinunciare a dare una discendenza legittima al marito defunto, e poter perpetuare, così, il suo nome. Al fratello del defunto si ricorda il grave obbligo di sposarsi con la cognata vedova per mantenere vivi in Israele il nome e la memoria del fratello defunto, dandogli un figlio che sarà considerato figlio legittimo del defunto a tutti gli effetti. Nel caso che il cognato non voglia sposarsi con sua cognata, verrà seguito il processo prescritto nella legge, e la vedova resterà libera di sposarsi con chi vuole.

Il filo conduttore che univa la giovane vedova Rut alla suocera Noemi, a sua volta vedova, era così forte che le due donne non si separarono più e aiutò Rut a non rifarsi una vita nel suo Paese di origine. Tale sentimento di scambievole amore e dedizione diventa un modello per il popolo di Israele. Modello contraddistinto dal riconoscimento e dal rispetto della libertà dell'una e dell'altra. Noemi vorrebbe rimandare Rut nella sua terra (*Rt* 1,14), a casa dei suoi genitori, dove può sentirsi più sicura. Non vuole trattenerla, farla sua, perché non ha nulla da offrirle se non il suo amore senza nome. Per questo motivo le chiede di andarsene (*Rt* 1,14). Ma Rut, senza pensarci troppo, la supplica umilmente: “Non forzarmi a lasciarti e ad allontanarmi da te, perché dove tu andrai, andrò anch'io e dove tu dimorerai anch'io dimorerò; il tuo popolo sarà il mio popolo e il tuo Dio sarà il mio Dio” (*Rt*, 1,16). Questa storia fa vedere come la mano di Dio sia all'opera anche nel pieno della storia quotidiana. Nella vita di coloro che sono fedeli, l'amore di Dio diventa realtà concreta. La storia di Rut testimonia il valore che le nostre azioni di bontà e di fedeltà hanno nel piano salvifico di Dio¹⁰

(Ref: *Religiosi in Italia*, n° 430, pp. 59 – 65)

(An English translation can be found on the SEDOS website in a while.)



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¹⁰ Cfr. P. Viviano, “Rut. Guida alla lettura”, in *Introduzione generale allo studio della Bibbia*, Edizione italiana a cura di F. Dalla Vecchia, - A. Nepi, - G. Corti, Qumraniana, Brescia 1996, 199; G. Witaszek, “Uniwersalizm religijny w Księdze Rut”, in *Biblia podstawą jedności*, A. R. Sikora (Red.), Red. Wydaw. KUL, Lublin 1996, 37-48; F. Raurell, “Rut, l’amore come dialogo”, in *RCat* T37/1 (2012) 181-201.

L'Apparition du Christ Ressuscite à sa Mère !

Lecture négro-africaine du texte ignatien [E.S. 218-225]

«C'est à toi que nous parlons, Femme muntu, qui aspire avec raison à être mère, épouse unique, et citoyenne à part entière dans la vie sociale, économique et politique, personne prépondérante de notre civilisation, ministre de la circulation du sang et de la culture de base - la langue que nous parlons ne s'appelle-t-elle pas langue maternelle ?» (Mzee Munzihirwa)¹.

Introduction

Les évangiles ne rapportent pas une apparition de Jésus-Christ à Marie, sa Mère. Cependant Saint Ignace de Loyola, fondateur des Jésuites et auteur des *Exercices Spirituels*, propose aux retraitants un exercice de contemplation de la rencontre du Ressuscité avec sa Mère bénie² ! La présente réflexion se concentre sur la supposée « apparition à Notre Dame » [E.S., 218-225 ; 299], Il s'agit de lire cette contemplation ignatienne avec le *background* culturel négro-africain pour juger de sa pertinence et de son sens avec des arguments propres à l'Afrique noire³. Car, selon la sagesse de la

spiritualité ignatienne, les Exercices sont présentés, reçus et faits « différemment » selon les époques, les personnes et les situations, puisqu'il n'y a pas une expérience, même spirituelle, qui ne soit conditionnée par le contexte (historique, politique, culturel, etc.)⁴.

1. Le texte ignatien

Après avoir fait méditer toute la vie de Jésus depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa mort, Ignace de Loyola propose à l'exercitant de contempler aussi le Christ ressuscité⁵. Prenant distance des témoignages écrits et rapportés dans le Nouveau Testament, la première apparition du Christ ressuscité, selon les *Exercices Spirituels*, était réservée à la Vierge Marie. Voici le texte des ES:

218 1)La première contemplation : comment le Christ Notre Seigneur apparut à Notre Dame (299). 2)La prière préparatoire habituelle.

219. 1)Le premier préambule est l'histoire. C'est ici comment, après que le Christ eut expiré sur la croix et que le corps resta séparé de l'âme, la divinité étant toujours unie à lui, l'âme bienheureuse descendit aux enfers, unie pareillement à la divinité; 2)et, après avoir tiré de là les âmes justes et être venu au sépulcre, ressuscité, il apparut en corps et en âme à sa

¹ Cf. Mzee Munzihirwa, « Aux racines du développement, le rôle de la femme », 361.

² Cf. I. de Loyola, *Exercices Spirituels* (E. Gueydan, trad.), Paris, DBB, 1987, [218-225 ; 299]. Désormais [E.S.].

³ Nous sommes conscients qu'à Père de l'interculturalité, il est malaisé de parler d'une « culture africaine ». La même difficulté se présente aussi lorsqu'on parle de la « femme africaine », car celle des villes n'a plus les mêmes habitudes que celle des milieux ruraux ou enclavés. Cette difficulté méthodologique ne nous empêche pas de réfléchir sur ce qui demeure, se recoupe d'une partie de l'Afrique à une autre et constitue le substrat des éléments de la culture négro-africaine et qu'on peut encore retrouver chez une bonne partie des femmes africaines où qu'elles soient. Cf. J. Maquet, *Africanité traditionnelle et moderne*, Paris, Présence africaine, 1967; A. Thiam, *La Parole aux Négresses*, Paris,

Denoël-Gonthier, 1978; Aa.Vv., *La civilisation de la femme dans la tradition africaine* (Colloque d'Abidjan 3-8 juillet 1972), Paris, Présence Africaine, 1978; Aa.Vv., *Des femmes écrivent l'Afrique*, 3 vols., Paris, Karthala, 2007-2010.

⁴ Cf. G. Malulu Lock, « Les Exercices de saint Ignace et l'Afrique. Propos sur deux priorités de la Compagnie de Jésus », 486; J.-C. Guy, « Le livre des Exercices », in Saint Ignace de Loyola, *Exercices Spirituels*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, 20.

⁵ C'est la matière de ce qu'il appelle la « Quatrième semaine », c'est-à-dire la dernière étape dans la subdivision des matières dans le livret des Exercices Spirituels. Cf. [E.S. 4].

mère bénie.

220. *Le deuxième*: une composition en se représentant le lieu; ce sera ici de voir la disposition du saint sépulcre et l'endroit où bien la maison de Notre Dame, en en regardant chaque partie, une à une, comme la chambre, l'oratoire, etc.

221. *Le troisième*: demander ce que je veux. Ce sera, ici, demander la grâce d'éprouver intensément allégresse et joie de la si grande gloire et joie du Christ notre Seigneur.

222. *Les premier, deuxième et troisième points* seront les mêmes que d'habitude, ceux que nous avons pour la Cène du Christ notre Seigneur.

223. *Le quatrième*: considérer comment la divinité, qui paraissait se cacher dans la Passion, paraît et se montre maintenant si miraculeusement dans la très sainte Résurrection, par les vrais et très saints effets de celle-ci.

224. *Le cinquième*: regarder l'office de consolation que vient exercer le Christ notre Seigneur et le comparer à la façon dont des amis ont l'habitude de se consoler les uns les autres.

225. Terminer avec un *colloque* ou des colloques, selon la matière proposée, puis un *Pater noster* [E.S., 218-225].

Il s'agit là d'une belle intuition spirituelle qu'Ignace propose - à la suite donc de ses inspirateurs⁶ - sous la forme d'une affirmation de foi: Jésus Christ Ressuscité s'est montré à plusieurs personnes dont la première fut sa mère bénie [E.S., 219]. Cependant, elle soulève quelques interrogations: Jésus ressuscité serait-il vraiment apparu à Marie? Autrement dit, l'idée est-elle soutenable, avec quels arguments? Pourquoi Jésus ressuscité devrait-il se montrer en premier lieu à sa Mère? Comment soutenir la véracité ou

⁶ Si on creuse dans la tradition notamment patristique, on découvre qu'indépendamment de l'exégèse, il existait effectivement une dévotion à l'apparition du Christ à Notre Dame. Voir par exemple: S. Arzubialde, « Una lectura teológica de la aparición del Resucitado a Ntra Sra. sobre dos traducciones castellanas del siglo XVI », in *Man.* 64 (1992) 71-86; Jean Chrysostome Homélie 88 in *Matt.* (PG. 58, 777); Albert le Grand, in *Evang Marti* (16, 9), «Christus Matri apparuit, non ut probaret resurrectionem, sed ut eam visu suo laetificaret», in *Opéra Omnia* (Ed. Borgnet), n°21, 755.

mieux la possibilité d'une telle apparition à partir d'éléments anthropologiques et culturels négro africains ?

2. Une lecture négro-africaine du texte ignatien

Pour saisir le sens de cette apparition ainsi que les arguments qui pourraient la soutenir, nous interrogeons *le rôle de la femme* dans les sociétés traditionnelles africaines et la relation de la femme avec son enfant chez le négro-africain. « *La société africaine traditionnelle, malgré les abus inhérents à toute civilisation, était conçue de façon à donner à la femme sa valeur, compte tenu du milieu sociologique dans lequel elle se trouvait* »⁷. Comme toute femme mais avec un accent culturel et affectif propre, elle était épouse et mère, et en tant que telle, elle jouait un rôle important dans la société au sein de laquelle elle jouissait d'ailleurs d'une considération particulière⁸. Dans l'univers négro-africain la femme est avant tout épouse et mère.

a. Femme noire, l'épouse

La première identité (épouse) la met particulièrement en relation, d'une part, avec son époux, sa maisonnée et, d'autre part avec la société. En tant qu'épouse la femme noire remplit différentes tâches dans le foyer. En effet, aujourd'hui encore, dans plusieurs pays africains, les familles vivent de l'effort et de la débrouillardise de la femme, épouse et mère. Selon les contextes, elle cultive, vend, cherche, travaille, etc.

⁷ Mzee Munzihirwa, «Aux racines du développement, le rôle de la femme», in *Zaire-Afrique*, n° 196 (Juin-Juillet-Août 1985) 349-361, 351. Pour étoffer ce point, nous nous sommes largement inspirés des écrits de Monseigneur Christophe Munzihirwa, évêque et martyr du Congo: «Aux racines du développement, le rôle de la femme», et «Le Zaïre face à l'avenir des familles», in *Zaire-Afrique*, n° 206, (Juin-Juillet-Août 1986) 337-339.

⁸ Sur le rôle de la femme, sa place et son identité dans la société africaine, nous reprenons largement notre article paru dans Congo Afrique: G. Malulu Lock, «La femme dans la poésie négro-africaine d'expression française. Quels gages pour une culture de la lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes ?», in *Congo-Afrique*, 521 (Janvier 2018) 78-83.

La femme africaine, hier et aujourd'hui, reste encore celle qui soutient la société - culturellement, économiquement, religieusement, etc. -, elle en garantit la survie et l'avenir. « *Nous sommes les femmes, nous sommes bien plus qu'une partie de la population, nous sommes responsables de la population d'aujourd'hui mais aussi de la population de demain; c'est entre nos mains que repose l'avenir de nos nations* », disait-on à juste titre aux stagiaires africaines séjournant en Israël⁹. L'évêque jésuite Christophe Munzihirwa, avait très bien résumé cette première identité et fonction de la femme dans la culture négro-africaine : « Elle est à la fois facteur principal de stabilité et pilier de la vie sociale. Educatrice née, c'est par elle plutôt que par l'homme que se transmettent les coutumes et les traditions: *Eduquer un homme a-t-on dit, c'est éduquer un individu, mais éduquer une femme, c'est éduquer un peuple* »¹⁰. Puisqu'elle donne la vie, la soutient tout au long de son épanouissement dans la société, elle est Mère. Nous allons approfondir le sens de cette relation qui la lie particulièrement à ses enfants.

b. Femme noire, la mère

En Afrique, la femme n'est pas seulement épouse. Elle est aussi mère. L'Afrique tient à cette qualité irremplaçable de la femme. Même une jeune qui n'est pas encore à l'âge de concevoir est parfois appelée « mère-maman » pour lui accorder le respect dévolu à la femme-mère. « En Afrique, remarquait encore Munzihirwa, ce n'est ni la rentabilité, ni le travail, ni l'amour, ni la fortune, ni le rang social, qui donnait la vraie valeur à la femme, mais c'est la maternité »¹¹. Bien que toute femme a de la considération notamment à cause de sa maternité naturelle - potentiellement mère, même sans avoir mis au monde -, pour « les peuples d'Afrique noire, observe Marcel Matungulu, le fait de ne pas avoir une progéniture est une grande

humiliation, un malheur que ni la richesse matérielle, ni les qualités morales, ne peuvent compenser »¹². C'est pourquoi, même un couple qui n'a pas d'enfant finit très souvent par se séparer¹³. En effet, renchérit Munzihirwa, « dans l'Afrique ancestrale, la femme stérile n'est que tolérée, et même la vie de célibataire n'était pas, dans notre conception, justifiable. La femme est riche d'humanité car elle est admirablement épanouie par sa maternité et admirablement équilibrée par son sens de l'hospitalité »¹⁴.

Dans l'univers négro-africain donc, la femme est mère. Une des missions qu'elle a reçues de Dieu serait de se marier et d'avoir des enfants¹⁵. Porteuse de la vie, elle est la mère de tous les hommes (*homo* non pas *vir*). C'est parce que Dieu ne voulait pas être visible partout, qu'il créa les mères pour s'occuper des enfants, pense le Négro. On n'a pas encore trouvé de mots plus adéquats que ceux du poète romancier guinéen Camara Laye (1928-1980) pour exprimer le secret de la relation de l'enfant noir avec sa mère.

c. Enfant noir et sa mère, complicité affective

La relation entre la mère et l'enfant commence à la gestation. La complicité affective profonde est inexplicable avec des arguments rationnels. Chaque enfant noir, même devenu adulte, se retrouve encore dans le célèbre poème que nous désirons analyser.

¹² Matungulu Otene, *Célibat consacré pour une Afrique assoiffée de fécondité*, Kinshasa, St. Paul Afrique, 1979, 16.

¹³ Cf. Matungulu Otene, *Fidèle au Christ et à l'univers négro-africain. Ebauche d'une spiritualité*, Lubumbashi, Saint Paul Afrique, 1980, 53.

¹⁴ Mzee Munzihirwa, «Aux racines du développement, le rôle de la femme», 351.

¹⁵ Mzee Munzihirwa que nous paraphrasons soutient son argumentaire avec ce proverbe Ntu: «Les femmes ressemblent à Dieu parce que c'est sur leur dos qu'elles portent les enfants». Cf. Mzee Munzihirwa, «Aux racines du développement, le rôle de la femme», 351.

⁹ Mzee Munzihirwa, «Aux racines du développement, le rôle de la femme», 349.

¹⁰ *Idem.*, 351.

¹¹ *Idem.*, 352.

1. *A ma Mère*
Femme noire, femme africaine
O toi, ma mère, je pense à toi...
O Daman, ô ma mère,
2. *toi qui me portas sur le dos,*
toi qui m'allaitas,
toi qui gouvernas mes premiers pas,
toi qui la première, m'ouvris les yeux aux
prodiges de la terre,
je pense à toi...
3. *Femme des champs,*
femme des rivières,
femme du grand fleuve,
ô toi, ma mère, je pense à toi...
4. *O toi Daman, ô ma mère,*
toi qui essuyais mes larmes,
toi qui me réjouissais le cœur,
toi qui, patiemment supportais mes caprices,
5. *comme j'aimerais encore être près de*
toi, être enfant près de toi,
être enfant près de toi!
Femme simple, femme de la résignation,
O toi, ma mère, je pense à toi...
6. *Ô Dâman, Dâman de la grande*
famille des forgerons,
ma pensée toujours se tourne vers toi,
la tienne à chaque pas m'accompagne,
ô Dâman, ma mère, comme j'aimerais
encore être dans ta chaleur,
être enfant près de toi...
7. *Femme noire, femme africaine,*
O toi, ma mère, merci,
merci pour tout ce que tu fis pour moi,
*ton fils, si loin, si près de toi!*¹⁶

1. Le fait déjà de l'appeler affectueusement «dama (maman)» évoque les neuf mois qui séparent la conception de la naissance. Période pendant laquelle l'enfant est porté et où sa subsistance est intrinsèquement liée à sa mère.

2. «Toi qui me portas sur le dos» rappelle l'affection et la proximité complice entre une mère et son enfant. La femme noire porte

l'enfant au dos pendant qu'elle vaque à ses multiples occupations (ménagères, etc.) pour la survie de la maisonnée¹⁷.

3 et 6. Pour que la vie qu'elle donne s'épanouisse, la mère continue à la nourrir avec son lait mais aussi à travers les multiples labeurs qui meublent son quotidien: «femme des champs, femme des rivières», femme des marchés, femme des bureaux, (etc.); on pourrait aujourd'hui allonger la liste suivant le panorama de la débrouillardise féminine en Afrique.

4. L'enfant peut toutefois rencontrer des insatisfactions dans sa croissance. Il peut aussi manifester des caprices. Pour exprimer son mécontentement, son langage est souvent celui des larmes. L'enfant noir s'en souvient, c'est encore et toujours à la maman qu'on recourt. C'est elle qui essuie les larmes, console et supporte les caprices d'une vie en croissance.

5 et 7. «Comme j'aimerais encore être près de toi. Etre dans la chaleur, enfant près de toi» : Une remémoration si authentique ne peut qu'aboutir à la reconnaissance et au respect que d'aucuns expriment avec ce mot simple mais chargé de signification: Merci! «Merci pour tout ce que tu fis pour moi».

Cependant, malgré ces mots éloquents du poète romancier dans lesquels chaque enfant noir, fille ou garçon, -même devenu adulte- se reconnaît, il demeure difficile d'exprimer adéquatement le sentiment profond qui découle de la complicité de l'enfant et sa Mère notamment dans l'univers négro-africain. N'est-ce pas là une des raisons pour lesquelles, dans la vie, l'enfant noir réserve toujours une place de choix à sa mère ?

¹⁶ Camara Laye, *L'enfant noir*, Paris, Plon, 1953. La numérotation est de nous, pour le besoin de l'analyse. Dans la littérature musicale, la chanson "Marna" du chanteur R D. Congolais Papa Wemba (1949-2016) est aussi une classique pour dire les éloges de la "Mère".

¹⁷ Cf. A. Kéïta, *Femme d'Afrique. La vie d'Aoua Kéïta racontée par elle-même*, Présence Africaine, 1975; Ch. Obbo, *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*, London, Zed Press, 1980.

3. De l'anthropologie africaine à la théologie spirituelle chrétienne: Marie mère et disciple fidèle de Jésus Christ

A partir de cette approche culturelle, anthropologique, qui scrute le secret de la relation de l'enfant avec sa mère, le négro-africain renverse «l'analogie»¹⁸. C'est-à-dire qu'à partir de son expérience avec sa mère, l'enfant noir, même devenu chrétien, peut comprendre que Jésus devrait, sans doute, se montrer à sa Mère en premier lieu. En se mettant dans la peau de Jésus, avec ses mêmes sentiments (Ph 2,5), le Négro-africain admet sans problème la possibilité d'une telle rencontre. Celle-ci serait même une évidence.

En effet, la vie et l'activité de Jésus étaient liées à la vie de Marie. Celle-ci était à la fois la Mère qui engendra Jésus (Mt 13,55) et sa disciple la plus fidèle. Comme Mère, Marie s'était, par exemple, exilée pour protéger la vie du nouveau-né (Mt 2,1-19). Et lorsqu'il avait douze ans, la mère avait souffert de la disparition de l'enfant au Temple (Lc 2,42-52). Elle anticipa l'Heure de Jésus aux noces de Cana (Jn 2,1-11). Et, toujours comme mère mais à la fois comme disciple, Marie était présente à l'Heure accomplie de Jésus lorsque, du haut de sa croix, Jésus la confia à ses disciples de toutes les époques: «Voici ta mère» (Jn 19,25-27). Marie, la discipline était à la suite de son Fils jusqu'à la passion. Dans la prière avec la communauté des disciples elle attendait l'Esprit qui ouvrit l'Eglise à l'annonce de la Bonne Nouvelle (Ac 1,14).

Toutefois, les Ecritures ne rapportent pas une apparition du Christ à Marie. Elles présentent les apparitions en commençant par la visite des femmes au tombeau et la rencontre de l'ange qui leur annonça la résurrection. Il y a ensuite le face à face avec le Ressuscité qui fit d'elles les premières messagères de cette bonne nouvelle (Mt 28,9-10; Mc 16,6). Paul pense, quant à lui, qu'il serait d'abord apparu à Céphas, puis aux Douze, etc. (1 Co 15,5). Dans tous les

cas, Pierre apparaît comme la norme pour la confirmation de la réalité de l'apparition et donc, de la résurrection (Lc 24,34; Jn 20,2).

Partant de ce «silence des Ecritures» et méditant la vie de Jésus, Ignace de Loyola déduit qu'il y aurait une apparition de Jésus ressuscité à sa Mère bénie. Il prend soin de justifier cette interprétation du texte sacré: «Il apparut à la Vierge Marie; ce qui, bien qu'on ne le dise pas dans l'Écriture, est considéré comme dit, puisqu'il est dit qu'il apparut à tant d'autres. Car l'Écriture suppose que nous avons de l'intelligence, selon ce qui est écrit: *Êtes-vous, vous aussi, sans intelligence ?* (Mt 15,16)» [E.S. 299]. Autrement dit, même si elles ne rapportent pas une apparition du Christ à Marie, les Ecritures avertissent qu'elles ne rapportent pas tout ce que Jésus a dit, a fait et a vécu (cf. Jn 21). Ce qui laisse comprendre que le lecteur et l'auditeur de la Parole ont de l'intelligence pour imaginer et établir les connexions entre les faits révélés, des mystères de la vie de Jésus (Mt 15,16). On le sait, ses Exercices Spirituels invitent souvent le retraitant à faire usage de *Y imagination* pour composer les lieux, pour contempler les personnes: ce qu'elles disent, font et vivent, etc. Il s'agit ici d'une bonne application des facultés de l'âme (l'intelligence, la mémoire et la volonté) sur le texte sacré.

Les théologiens occidentaux justifient «l'omission» d'une telle apparition dans les Ecritures. Ils expliquent le «silence» des textes sacrés, (ou leur allusion implicite) sans dire clairement pourquoi nous devons croire que Jésus ressuscité serait apparu en premier lieu à la Vierge Marie ! Les théologiens ont bien procédé en établissant un lien entre les différents mystères de la vie du Christ. Ils partent, comme Ignace d'ailleurs, du «silence des Ecritures» pour déduire qu'il y aurait une apparition de Jésus ressuscité à sa Mère bénie. C'est pourquoi cette ligne argumentative mérite d'être complétée par celle que nous proposons.

Alors qu'Ignace, et à sa suite beaucoup d'auteurs occidentaux, défend son interprétation de l'Écriture avec un raisonnement principalement *rationnel et*

¹⁸ Nous parlons du renversement des éléments de l'analogie car *l'analogatum princeps* demeure la relation de Jésus et Marie.

déductif, dans la perspective négro-africaine, l'argument soutenable, sur cette apparition serait davantage du *type affectif* (la complicité, le secret de la relation mère et enfant) et le procédé adéquat est l'*induction*. Si les premiers ont souvent résolu le dilemme en répondant à la question : « pourquoi l'écriture ne rapporte pas l'apparition à Marie ? », nous poserons, quant à nous, la question autrement : « pourquoi Jésus devrait-il « nécessairement » apparaître en premier lieu à Marie ? »

En d'autres mots, on doit considérer tout le poids anthropologique de la relation mère et enfant pour conclure, d'une part, qu'un tel enfant ne pouvait pas ne pas visiter sa Mère et, d'autre part, une telle rencontre devait être la première de toutes.

Il ressort ainsi de l'expérience de l'enfant noir et, par une « analogie renversée », il pourrait en être ainsi pour le Fils de Marie ressuscité après la passion et la mort. Certes, les Ecritures et la Tradition ne disent pas explicitement que Jésus était apparu à la Vierge Marie et des réflexions ont été menées notamment en Occident pour comprendre ce silence. Au bout de notre parcours réflexif, nous désirons réaffirmer fortement l'intuition ignatienne avec l'approche négro-africaine : si Jésus, Fils de Dieu, est vraiment fils de Marie, il ne devrait qu'apparaître d'abord à Marie car elle est sa Mère (sa maman) !

Conclusion

Il est vrai que, comme le notait Santiago Arzubialde, l'apparition à Marie est parmi les questions de foi qui peuvent créer la confusion si on l'aborde *a-critiquement* dès lors qu'elle confronte le champ propre à l'exégèse avec celui de la piété ou de la dévotion¹⁹. Mais elle méritait d'être étudiée à

¹⁹ Cf. S. Arzubialde, « Una lectura teológica de la aparición del Resucitado a Ntra Sra. sobre dos traducciones castellanas del siglo XVI », in *Man*. 64 (1992) 71-86, 72. Parmi les opinions opposées à cette apparition, il y a celle d'Yves Congar qui pense qu'elle est bibliquement discutable, Marie n'avait besoin d'aucune apparition. Et celle-ci fait l'ombre à la protovision attestée à Pierre. Cf. Y. Congar, « Incidence ecclésiologique d'un thème de dévotion

cause de la place de choix qu'Ignace de Loyola lui réserve dans la dynamique de la Quatrième Semaine des Exercices.

Notre étude voulait qu'à travers l'exercice ignatien - lu, expérimenté et vécu à l'africaine - la personne qui s'engage à l'expérience des Exercices Spirituels arrive à saisir la vérité de l'intuition spirituelle ignatienne à partir de l'expérience « de l'enfant noir avec sa mère ». Dans le cas concret de l'apparition qui nous concerne, nous avons ressorti certains éléments de la culture négro-africaine pour une bonne intelligence de cette contemplation²⁰. Il en découle que la culture négro-africaine et, donc aussi, la foi de l'Africain, même devenu chrétien, admet, sans difficulté, cette intuition spirituelle extra biblique. Si l'Enfant de Marie s'est montré à d'autres, Il s'était certainement montré à sa Mère, pourrait-on dire, suivant la sagesse négro-africaine. Peu importe alors ce que la Mère et le Fils se sont dit !

Plaise à Dieu que le respect et la considération que « l'Enfant noir » réserve à « sa Mère » soit aussi accordés à « chaque femme ». Car elles sont toutes Mères ou potentiellement Mères²¹.

(Ref: Telema, Revue de réflexion et créativité Chrétiennes en Afrique, Vol. 1/19, pp. 10 – 19)

(An English translation can be found on the SEDOS website in a while.)

mariale», in *Mélanges de Science Religieuse* 7 (1950) 276-292.

²⁰ Ainsi faisant, croyons-nous, le chrétien africain, s'élèvera petit à petit à ces hauteurs vers le Christ, dont parlait Meinard Hebga, sans nécessairement transiter par les expériences d'autres cultures. L'idée géniale du père Hebga a été triomphalement reprise dans la thèse d'Oscar Bimweny Kweshi. Cf. M.P. Hebga, *Emancipation d'Eglises sous tutelle. Essai sur l'ère post-missionnaire*, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1976, 158; O. Bimwenyi Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain. Problème des fondements* (thèse doctorale en vue de l'obtention du grade de Docteur en Théologie), Louvain, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1977, 188.

²¹ Cf. G. Malulu, « La femme dans la poésie négro-africaine d'expression française », in *Congo-Afrique*, 521 (Janvier 2018) 83.

Vida religiosa

entre el oso y las hormigas

En estos días que hemos pasado en cuarentena, 107 para ser exactos, me ha dado tiempo para pensar, reflexionar y contrastar muchas cosas de nuestra vida religiosa a la luz de lo vivido. La cuarentena para nosotros los religiosos, en lo que tiene de 'encierro': relaciones personales intensas, permanencia en un lugar cerrado y privación de algunas experiencias sociales y relacionales, etc., solo nos ha devuelto una dimensión quizá algo olvidada o adulterada por la vida híper-activa que llevamos. La cuarentena nos ha recordado que toda vida religiosa tiene una dimensión contemplativa, un espacio de claustro, que no solo es consustancial a la vida religiosa misma, sino que perderla es relajar nuestra propia opción vocacional. Así que, por ese lado, para nosotros este tiempo de confinamiento, aislamiento... ha sido un tiempo de desierto, pero no de aridez y sequedad, de muerte y desolación, sino el lugar donde se renueva el primer amor, tal cual indica el profeta Oseas (2,14): «Así que voy a seducirla, la llevaré al desierto y allí le hablaré a su corazón».

¿Qué hemos escuchado en nuestro corazón estos días? ¿Qué encuentros interiores hemos experimentado en la oración y la contemplación, en el silencio y en la cadencia monótona de los días? ¿Qué pensamientos y reflexiones nos han ocupado fundamentalmente? ¿Qué emociones y sentimientos pasaron y cómo los vivimos?

¿Qué inquietudes aparecieron y quiénes eran el objeto de esas inquietudes? 'Hablar al corazón' no es una expresión afectiva exclusivamente, en la escritura, el corazón es la sede vital de la persona, pero quiere hablar de totalidad, no solo del ámbito emocional, por importante y significativo que sea. En el fondo, la pregunta fundamental a mi entender sería: ¿he vivido seducido por Dios en este tiempo? Y

ciertamente hay indicadores objetivos para determinar con qué o con quién me he sentido seducido:

- El tiempo extra donde lo he utilizado.
- En los momentos de ansiedad a qué o a quién me he agarrado.
- En el hastío y el cansancio donde he reposado.
- Cuáles han sido mis

preocupaciones fundamentales.

- Han sido los pobres una inquietud fastidiosa de conciencia estos días?

Comparto parte de mi experiencia en este tiempo, en donde se me aparecieron estas dos posibilidades: vivir como un oso (y no solo por mi abundante pelo) o como hormiga.

DOS MANERAS DE VIVIR EL 'INVIERNO*'. EL OSO Y LAS HORMIGAS

Cuando llega el invierno, ambiental o del alma (del que hablaban san Juan de la Cruz, santa Teresa y tantos otros santos), podemos enfrentarnos a dos posturas vitales que tienen



su parangón en el mundo animal: los osos y las hormigas. Invierno es un tiempo ‘aparente’ de muerte o, al menos, de no vida (que no es lo mismo). Todo árbol, siendo árbol, no se reconoce muerto en su letargo invernal sino solo ‘en espera’, porque no tiene la posibilidad de la esperanza, sino solo de la sucesión temporal que más tarde o más temprano, acabará suscitando dentro de él una fuerza nueva (y vieja porque siempre es la misma) de vida, haciéndolo brotar nuevamente y suscitando fruto conforme a su naturaleza. Si esto lo ‘vive’ un vegetal, ¿por qué a los seres humanos nos cuesta tanto reconocer esta ley de vida que nos conforma? Y aún más en concreto, si la vida religiosa es signo y profecía del Evangelio y de Jesucristo mismo, ¿por qué vivimos nuestro otoño e invierno como momentos de fragilidad, límite o final? Quizá, observar a nuestra naturaleza nos ayude a situarnos como personas y como religiosos. Aquí nace mi reflexión de hoy, ñuto de este encierro civil y puesta la mirada en la creación que nos circunda.



¿QUÉ HACEN LOS OSOS?

Los osos, junto a otros animales, ante el inclemente invierno por su temperatura extrema y la ausencia de comida (no es una propuesta voluntaria sino obligada por las situaciones) hacen acopio personal de alimento que acaba generando grasa corporal de la cual irán consumiendo en su temporada de inactividad y sueño. Es un ejercicio de supervivencia forzado y centrado en la propia vida, de tal manera que no se alimentan en el invierno de productos

recolectados sino de los propios consumidos en exceso para crear lo que será su despensa hiberna, su propia grasa. (No podemos decir que sea una medida egoísta cuanto de supervivencia).

Este proceso lo viven centrados única-mente en sí mismos, ni siquiera los cachorros son alimentados por sus padres, sino que ellos mismos han de proveerse de un exceso de comida para que el periodo en el que tendrán que estar durmiendo (porque es el estado de menos consumo energético), puedan sobrevivir sin comer. Es tan extrema la situación que, si uno entrara en una guarida de osos en pleno invierno y los despertara, o nos mirarían con ojos tiernos como diciendo ‘déjame dormir que tengo mucho sueño’ cual buen adolescente humano, sino que con harta hambre y brutal ferocidad nos devoraría sin pensarlo al sentir la punzante hambre que le embarga. Que es precisamente lo que hará cuando acabe el periodo invernal y salga a cazar.

De esta práctica ursina sacamos algunas conclusiones evidentes:

- Ante la inclemencia y la escasez, hay que guardar personalmente para cuando no hay.
- Cuando la amenaza exterior es superior a mis fuerzas, lo mejor es prevenir, aunque conlleve un sacrificio físico (en este caso).
- Durante el invierno quien se cuida debe permanecer inactivo para no gastar energía que no le sobra.
- Lo importante es uno mismo, pues está en uno la capacidad de poder sobrevivir del excedente alimenticio adquirido en la época de primavera, verano y otoño.

¿QUÉ HACEN LAS HORMIGAS?

Las hormigas son una especie que destaca por su organización social. Cada una nace con ‘una vocación’ específica y algunas de ellas con la posibilidad de desarrollar esa vocación y convertirse en reinas. Básicamente están las obreras, las soldados, las princesas y la reina. Según la especie puede variar, pero poco. No vamos a dar una clase de mirmecología que es una rama de la

entomología que estudia a estos insectos. Vamos a centrarnos en su respuesta al invierno, tal y como hemos visto en los osos. ¿Qué hacen las hormigas ante el invierno?

La necesidad de las hormigas no es esconderse porque no haya alimento en invierno, sino por el efecto que el frío provoca en sus cuerpos. Como en nosotros, el frío afecta su sistema linfático y las paraliza. Para evitarlo, o bien viven en lugares cálidos, pero donde hay invierno con bajas temperaturas necesitan hibernar. ¿Cómo se preparan? Pues de manera organizada, sin dejar de pensar (aunque no piensen) en el grupo, hacen acopio de alimentos que almacenan en sus alacenas (lugares del hormiguero bien ventilados para conservar el alimento). Tienden a profundizar, esto es, acudir a los lugares más hondos del hormiguero para encontrar mayor calor y siguen su actividad de manera más ralentizada. Las obreras alimentan a la reina y al resto; las soldados cuidan las larvas y mantienen la entrada protegida; y la reina continúa dando vida, esto es, poniendo huevos (larvas) que se convertirán en nuevas hormigas. Han de realizar labores de limpieza y de asegurar la entrada ante posibles peligros exteriores. Cuando el frío constante desaparece, aprovechan los momentos de sol para salir, tomar calor en su cuerpo y regresar a sus lugares, muy juntas para conservar el calor corporal y que se mantenga más tiempo.

De esta práctica sacamos otras conclusiones:

- Las hormigas no cesan su actividad en ningún momento, solo se reorganizan para poder subsistir y asegurar la producción de vida manteniendo a la reina.
- Los roles se mantienen, aunque diversifican los objetivos.
- Hay un movimiento generalizado a profundizar, donde el calor de la tierra les asegura la actividad y la vida.
- Se da una tendencia a juntarse más para mantener mejor la temperatura corporal y evitar que se queden paralizadas por el frío exterior.

- La producción de vida no se interrumpe, por eso, continúan sirviendo a la reina y cuidando las larvas.

Y presentados estas dos maneras de afrontar el invierno, ¿qué tiene que ver esto con la vida religiosa? Pues son como dos parábolas modernas, actuales, que intentan reflejar dos actitudes de la vida religiosa al momento en el que estamos y que denominamos 'invierno' (por falta de vocaciones, por la pandemia, por la falta de valores cristianos en la sociedad...).

¿POR QUÉ LES HABLA EN PARÁBOLAS?

Cuando Jesús insiste en hablar con parábolas a los que le siguen para escucharle, acaba suscitando una pregunta entre el grupo más íntimo. Este momento lo refleja el Evangelio de Mateo y en concreto en medio de la parábola del sembrador. El motivo de estas comparaciones anteriores quiere tener también este marco evangélico (Mt 13,10-16). ¿Por qué les habla en parábolas?

Jesús les contestó: «Austedes, Dios les da a conocer los secretos del Reino de los cielos; pero a ellos no. Pues al que tiene, se le dará más, y tendrá bastante; pero al que no tiene, hasta lo poco que tiene se le quitará. Por eso les hablo por medio de parábolas; porque ellos miran, pero no ven; escuchan, pero no oyen ni entienden. Así, en el caso de ellos se cumple lo que dijo el profeta Isaías:

“Por más que escuchen, no entenderán, por más que miren, no verán.

Pues la mente de este pueblo

está entorpecida,

tienen tapados los oídos

y han cerrado sus ojos,

para no ver ni oír,

para no entender ni volverse a mí,

para que yo no los sane”.

Pero dichosos ustedes, porque tienen ojos que ven y oídos que oyen. Les aseguro que muchos profetas y personas justas quisieron ver esto que ustedes ven, y no lo vieron; quisieron oír esto que ustedes oyen, y no lo oyeron».

Tras escuchar la primera parte desarrollada y este texto del Evangelio, ¿dónde nos situamos? ¿Entre los que ‘conocemos los secretos del Reino de los cielos’; entre los que ‘tienen tapados los oídos y han cerrado sus ojos’ o en la dicha de ‘tener ojos que ven y oídos que oyen’?

La vida religiosa tiene vocación de intimidad, de ser parte de ese grupo pequeño que acompaña a Jesús presente en nuestro tiempo. El origen de la vida religiosa no es tanto la misión evangelizadora como hoy la entendemos sino el testimonio vivo de reflejar la vida de Jesucristo. Estamos llamados a discernir su presencia y su vida en los acontecimientos presentes, en las personas contemporáneas, en la lectura creyente de la historia reciente para encamarla y reflejar a Jesús hoy. Tener oídos que oyen y ojos que ven es tener la capacidad, el don, de escuchar con los oídos de Jesús y tener la mirada del Cristo.

Los osos se parecen a (cf. Le 12,13-21) «aquel hombre rico, cuyas tierras dieron una gran cosecha. El rico se puso a pensar: “¿Qué haré? No tengo dónde guardar mi cosecha”. Y se dijo: “Ya sé lo que voy a hacer. Derribaré mis graneros y levantaré otros más grandes, para guardar en ellos toda mi cosecha y todo lo que tengo. Luego me diré: Amigo, tienes muchas cosas guardadas para muchos años; descansa, come, bebe, goza de la vida”. Pero Dios le dijo: “Necio, esta misma noche perderás la vida, y lo que tienes guardado, ¿para quién será?”. Así le pasa al hombre que amontona riquezas para sí mismo, pero es pobre delante de Dios».

Hoy vivimos en esta tensión de sobrevivir a toda costa, pero sobrevivir yo, mi comunidad, mi congregación, al estilo del oso. Hagamos campaña vocacional agresiva, engrosemos cuanto podamos y replegué monos en nuestra misión, en nuestro espacio y con nuestra gente. Permanezcamos escondidos ante tanta inclemencia ambiental, distanciémonos de la amenaza y creemos espacios para la supervivencia. Sé que es una ‘exageración’ como cada una de las

parábolas de Jesús en el Evangelio, pero aumentando la realidad es donde se ven los recovecos a limpiar y renovar. Analicemos más en concreto actitudes que se pueden estar dando entre nosotros y que nos sirva como materia para nuestra reflexión y discernimiento.

La parábola que acabamos de escuchar y que refleja muy bien esa actitud «osuna», se reconoce en nuestras vidas en algunos indicadores:

- El texto bíblico advierte sobre ‘Cuidarse de toda avaricia’. La avaricia es un afán desordenado de poseer con la característica de no compartir con nadie. Estoy seguro que ninguno de nosotros acaparamos plata en nuestras cuentas, y si la hay, es para las necesidades ordinarias, pero sí podemos estar cayendo en la segunda parte de la avaricia ‘no compartir con otros’. En momentos de dificultad, prueba, escasez, la tendencia es guardarse o aprovecharse. Debemos analizar cuál es nuestra postura como religiosos, si en estos días estamos compartiendo lo que somos y lo que tenemos o solo guardando para los nuestros. Y ciertamente no hablo solo de bienes materiales (que también deberemos examinar ahí mirando a nuestro alrededor), sino de los dones espirituales y carismáticos. La donación tiene que ver con disponibilidad (y aquí entra de lleno nuestra obediencia a nuestros superiores y a la misma Iglesia), tiene que ver con la entrega desinteresada, en la que no busco que me necesiten (sutilidad muy arraigada en la vida consagrada) sino dar indiscriminadamente (la actitud del sembrador) y con la respuesta acomodada a la realidad, de manera que cada cual aporta su don carismático, pero asegurando que responde a la realidad en la que estamos. Está muy bien rezar por los que sufren, pero quizá necesitan una llamada y unas palabras de aliento. Está muy bien asegurar la catequesis, pero quizá necesitan comer. Está muy bien asegurar el servicio educativo, pero quizá está viviendo un entorno hostil y agresivo por la situación.

- Otra advertencia del Evangelio es 'Amontonar riquezas para un mismo'. De nuevo si entendemos estas riquezas desde la perspectiva material ninguno nos veremos reflejados en la afirmación, pero y si, como los osos, estamos amontonando riquezas espirituales para engrosar la grasa corporal de nuestro espíritu. Aquí entraría esa realidad a la que el papa Francisco llama autorreferencialidad. Donde el centro de mi vida espiritual soy yo y mis necesidades. ¿Cuántos estos días hemos expresado a alguien: es que necesito respirar, necesito mi espacio personal, tiempo para... ? Es una necesidad psicológica sin duda, es un



sentimiento que aparece sin yo buscarlo. Pero en este tiempo en donde se ha entronizado el mundo emocional o los reclamos de la propia biología, hemos recordamos que además de realidad afectiva y biológica soy también un ser racional, volitivo y espiritual. Las riquezas se amontonan cuando no logro equilibrar estas cinco dimensiones de mi persona: corporal, emocional, racional, voluntad y espiritual. Fíjense que somos capaces de determinar con facilidad a una persona que amontona riquezas de su cuerpo (gimnasios, vivir de la apariencia, obsesión por el peso y la talla...), o incluso por lo emocional (yo me siento así -y por tanto la realidad es solo lo que yo siento-, es que necesito sentir que valgo, que soy útil... y no logras sacarlos de ahí), o por lo racional (muy centrados en la lógica, lo intelectual, los estudios propios o la emancipación intelectual que hablan ex cátedra). Pero, ¿qué sería en nuestra vida amontonar riqueza de voluntad o riqueza

espiritual? La primera tiene que ver, de nuevo, con la obediencia, con la docilidad interior (que nunca es sumisión), con la apertura a la voluntad de Dios -no amontoño, si me vivo en búsqueda-, pues la voluntad de Dios que me saca de la tiranía de mi propia voluntad y juicio, siempre es una búsqueda y, normalmente, compartida, de ahí que requiere de otras instancias, de poder ser acompañado y contrastado. Y la segunda, el amontonar riquezas espirituales hace referencia a lo que Francisco señala como enemigos de la santidad en GeE y en EG: el gnosticismo. Que es esa seguridad de estar en la verdad y controlarla por medios espirituales, la obsesión por la pureza doctrinal, el liturgismo y que sesga la realidad para hacerla maniquea (lo bueno y lo malo; lo correcto y lo erróneo; lo verdadero y lo falso...) sin dar opción a los matices, a la interpretación, a la contextualización.

Y finalmente, esta parábola de Jesús concluye con una advertencia: 'rico para uno mismo y pobre delante de Dios'. Y ciertamente no hace referencia a la pobreza como actitud humilde ante Dios, sino como la persona que se llena de sí (de cualquiera de sus riquezas), centra su atención en las ganancias de este mundo. Podemos ubicar bien esta expresión recordando las palabras de Jesús en el sermón del monte cuando habla de la limosna, la oración y el ayuno. Hay acciones o adquisiciones que su premio es precisamente lo que adquirimos con ellas. Pero hay otra manera de vivir, que es hacerse rico ante Dios, bienaventurado, pobre. Y esto pasa necesariamente por la discreción, el anonimato, cambiando el horizonte de nuestras acciones.

Las hormigas se parecen (cf. Mt 6,25-34) a aquellos de los que Jesús dijo: «.. No se preocupen por lo que han de comer o beber para vivir, ni por la ropa que necesitan para el cuerpo. ¿No vale la vida más que la comida y el cuerpo más que la ropa? Miren las aves que vuelan por el aire: no siembran ni cosechan ni guardan la cosecha en graneros; sin embargo, el Padre de ustedes

que está en el cielo les da de comer. ¡Y ustedes valen más que las aves! En todo caso, por mucho que uno se preocupe, ¿cómo podrá prolongar su vida ni siquiera una hora? ¿Y por qué se preocupan ustedes por la ropa? Fíjense cómo crecen los lirios del campo: no trabajan ni hilan. Sin embargo, les digo que ni siquiera el rey Salomón, con todo su lujo, se vestía como uno de ellos. Pues si Dios viste así a la hierba, que hoy está en el campo y mañana se quema en el homo, ¡con mayor razón los vestirá a ustedes, gente falta de fe! Así que no se preocupen, preguntándose: “¿qué vamos a comer?” o “¿qué vamos a beber?” o “¿con qué vamos a vestimos?”. Todas estas cosas son las que preocupan a los paganos, pero ustedes tienen un Padre celestial que ya sabe que las necesitan. Por lo tanto, pongan toda su atención en el Reino de los cielos y en hacer lo que es justo ante Dios, y recibirán también todas estas cosas. No se preocupen por el día de mañana, porque mañana habrá tiempo para preocuparse. Cada día tiene bastante con sus propios problemas».

Lo primero a resaltar de la imagen de las hormigas es que dan una respuesta comunitaria ante una amenaza ambiental. La vida religiosa es entrañablemente comunitaria. La vivencia del carisma, el desarrollo y actualización del mismo, la misión, la postura y actuación que debe adoptar la congregación ante la realidad debe ser un ejercicio comunitario y, como hacen esos peculiares insectos, discernido. Cada uno tiene sus dones para el enriquecimiento y el bien del resto. Acogiendo la llamada del Papa a vivimos en continuo discernimiento, y este es un ejercicio, una tarea que no debemos dar por hecha. Discernir no es una práctica sin más, es una manera de vivir. ¿Nos hemos preguntado en este tiempo cómo debemos afrontar este momento como comunidad, como congregación? No es tiempo de cambiar dones y talentos sino de ajustar objetivos y divisar nuevos horizontes. En segundo lugar, destaco esta tendencia de las hormigas a profundizar. Qué imagen tan sugerente, poder acudir a un lugar donde la

vida es posible porque hay más calor, un medio más adecuado. ¿Qué es profundizar para un religioso? Ir al centro, ir a la fuente, ir a lo esencial. Es un momento privilegiado para la mística. Como se nos recordaba hace años con el sínodo que se celebró sobre la vida consagrada de donde nació Vita consecrata y que animaba a recuperar esta dimensión inherente a nuestra esencia. Porque mística no es rezar mucho, es hacer experiencia, provocar en uno y en la comunidad la experiencia de Dios, ayudar a constatarla, a buscarla, a desearla. En muchas ocasiones dedicamos muchos tiempos a capacitamos, a las charlas, incluso a los retiros, y es bueno, pero ¿conseguimos incrementar nuestro deseo de Dios? Como dice el poeta Luis Rosales ‘de noche iremos, de noche, que para encontrar la fuente solo la sed nos alumbra’. ¡Vivimos un momento tan adecuado para ser testigos de lo que profesamos! Jesús en este Evangelio que enmarca esta imagen que estoy utilizando hace una llamada a creer. Se percibe cierta ‘sabia rabia’ al decir: Dios viste así a la hierba, que hoy está en el campo y mañana se quema en el homo, ¡con mayor razón los vestirá a ustedes, gente falta de fe! Tendremos que preguntamos si las palabras, preocupaciones y temores han tenido el mismo contenido en una casa de estera en el cerro o en nuestra comunidad religiosa. Profundizar para salvaguardar la vida...

En tercer lugar, qué hermosa imagen la de las hormigas amontonadas unas sobre otras para conservar el calor más tiempo. Si una situación como la pandemia no nos une fraternalmente qué debemos esperar más. Ante tanta búsqueda de seguridad y precauciones (que están bien como ejemplo de ciudadanía, sin duda) no deberíamos taparnos los oídos a esa exclamación de Jesús en forma de pregunta: En todo caso, por mucho que uno se preocupe, ¿cómo podrá prolongar su vida ni siquiera una hora? La preocupación es un movimiento espontáneo del ser humano, pero depositar en preocupación en el centro de nuestra vida es vivir como paganos, como increyentes, como personas sin fe. ¿Dónde se apoyan

nuestras palabras cuando nuestras obras no las sostienen? La palabra de un consagrado debería ser un sacramento y esto solo se da si entre nuestra vida y nuestras palabras hay una conexión estrecha y coherente, aunque imperfecta porque no puede ser de otra manera. La vida comunitaria ha de salir fortalecida de este tiempo acogiendo las necesidades personales de cada uno y evangelizándolas. No perdamos esta oportunidad escondiendo nuestras heridas, nuestras flaquezas, nuestras debilidades, pues solo el compartir la mutua fragilidad provoca la fortaleza evangélica: ‘porque cuando soy débil, entonces soy fuerte’ reconocerá san Pablo. ¿Se han dado cuenta la tremenda diferencia que hay entre un oso y una hormiga? Pues toda la potencia, fuerza y magnificencia de los osos desgraciadamente no los salvará de la extinción. Las hormigas, en cambio, perdurarán en su minoridad. Son la especie más adaptativa y que mejor ha sabido adaptarse a cada época junto con la especie humana.

Y finalmente, el motor, la razón de ser, de vivir de una hormiga: seguir cuidando la generación de la vida estando al servicio de su reina. Toda su atención en el Reino de los cielos y en hacer lo que es justo ante Dios, y recibirán también todas estas cosas, nos deja dicho Jesús en este Evangelio. Necesito salud, vocaciones, claridad, ánimo, esperanza, luz, acogida, comprensión, ser querida, realizarme... Busca el Reino de Dios, pues todo el resto es ‘añadidura’ de Dios. Así paga El. ¿Sabe cuál es la característica que se le da a las hormigas? Providentes. Y nosotros tenemos a la misma Providencia que nos anima a decidimos por la vida. Cómo resuenan estos días las palabras de Benedicto XVI en Deus caritas esf. «No se comienza a ser cristiano por una decisión ética o una gran idea, sino por el encuentro con un acontecimiento, con una Persona, que da un nuevo horizonte a la vida y, con ello, una orientación decisiva». Es el momento de propiciar y alimentar este encuentro con esta Persona, con el acontecimiento pascual, qué es si no lo que

estamos viviendo. ¿Se puede consolar una pérdida humana robada atrozmente por un virus? No, no hay consuelo para la esposa ni para el hijo ni para el hermano. O vivimos la dinámica pascual o esto es el mayor de los tormentos. Preguntémonos pues, este día, a la luz de cómo hemos vivido estos días, cuál es nuestro horizonte y qué orientación decisiva le hemos dado. A mí me ha llenado de orgullo de clan (aunque suene mal), ver a mis hermanos sacerdotes en las parroquias saliendo de sus esquemas, estructuras y mediaciones enmohecidas por la rutina para dar una respuesta a los que pasan hambre, necesitan oxígeno, piden la Palabra y la Eucaristía. Este virus para la Iglesia, para la vida religiosa, puede ser la piedrecita que derribe al gigante del que habla Daniel en su profecía con pies de barro o, una maldición, teniendo la misma mirada que los paganos



que se preocupan por el mañana, cuando cada día tiene su propio afán. Nosotros tenemos un Padre en el cielo que ya sabe lo que necesitamos, pues vivamos el Padre nuestro y cuando lo recemos, que lo vean impreso en nuestras obras, en nuestros gestos, en nuestras palabras, en nuestra vida. Ahí queda el reto, el desafío. Afrontar nuestra vida consagrada como los osos o como las hormigas. Ahí les dejo.

(Ref.: Vida Religiosa, Oct. 2020 n.8 vol.129, p. 32-41)

(An English translation can be found on the SEDOS website in a while.)

SEDOS Annual Report 2020

Activities of SEDOS in 2020

Before the last General Assembly in 2019, from 8 to 9 November, we had the **Autumn Seminar 2019** on *The Contribution of Lay in Mission* at UISG, organized in cooperation with the *Lay Center of Rome*. Those who attended the Seminar were very happy. However, the number of participants was less than expected, about 25. Our fiscal year runs from November to the end of October next year. So, that financial statement is taken up in this year's Financial Report. As the one-day **Spring Session 2020** we had organized to hold at the Jesuits near the Vatican on 6th of March had to be postponed last-minute because of the lockdown. However, there was great interest in the topic of *Mission in China Today*: about 25 Ambassadors to the Holy See had registered. In the end, we decided to have it online on 19th of June. Because it was our first online Seminar, we had to prepare it well in advance, with the whole digital background that it requires. Participation was free because we were not sure how professional it would be. But the result was very much appreciated. We had excellent and high-level Speakers on the topic, and about 230 participants online. There was some diplomatic problems around the event which were solved in time. Because it was a sensitive topic, we decided not to have any question and answer time. The five-day **Residential Seminar 2020** on *Living Green Mission* had to be postponed as well a month before, and we have decided to hold it next year. All the Speakers have already agreed to come. If needed it will be online, or both if possible. The two-day **Autumn Seminar 2020** was organized in cooperation with *Faith and Praxis* on the topic of *Past, Present, Future of our Congregational Structures in the Service of Mission*. The Seminar was a success with more than 230

paying participants, although many were watching with several other. The reactions were all full of praise. It encourages us to go on in this line.

Administration of SEDOS in 2020

The unforeseen disturbance of all the projects caused by the Covid-19 sanitary crisis has obliged us to work from home for some months. It gave us the time to *clean up the digital archives* we inherited which were not always well organized. Sr. Celine worked on that especially. I was able with an SVD confrere to *dispose of our archives in the cellar* of the SEDOS office, before and after the lockdown, keeping only the most essential documents, such as those regarding the beginnings of SEDOS, and the first SEDOS Bulletins which are in fact four years older than the official date 1969 of the first volume we have now.



The cellar of the SEDOS office at SVD has been cleared out.

“Windows” announced that they would stop supporting “Windows 7”. Most of our computers were too old to function properly on the new “Windows 10” program. Because an foreseen surplus of the financial balance of this year, we took the opportunity to change the computers of the Director and of the Secretary to *all-in-one computers*, and to buy a large screen for the Webmaster to work on the website better.



The old computers have been given away.

Finances

The amount of the donation of the respective Congregation for the members working at SEDOS has been raised. At the same time, the Agreement between the person and SEDOS has been revised with some legal support from the USG. The spirit behind the new Agreement is that the person will work at SEDOS as part of the work for their own Congregation, and that person will not ask for a salary. This is to avoid possible misunderstandings in the future. The donation will go also straight to the Congregation, and not to the person him/herself.

“EasyFeel” company was helping us with cleaning the offices, but they charged us during the lockdown although no one came to work, and the cleaning lady did not receive anything for that period. They also had to reimburse money from before, but never responded to our requests, which led us to decide to end the contract. Now, we have the same cleaning lady (from Venezuela) who makes out an official two-monthly bill that SEDOS pays. She is much

better off this way as she receives more and has all the insurances, pension, tax, etc., paid from that, and SEDOS does not pay more as before in total. She can do this with other customers too in the future.

The Executive Committee decided two years ago to put a limit for the finances at the end of each fiscal year. This limit was set at 100,000 Euro. The running cost of the office is about 50,000 Euro, and the total cost per year about 75,000 Euro. This gives us about 25,000 Euro in case of need. Because there is a substantial surplus on the financial balance of this year, it was decided to reimburse this money to the SEDOS Members of 2021, 250/500 Euro.

Basic Activities of SEDOS in 2021

Spring Session 2021: *Islam and Mission* (probably 19 March, online); Residential Seminar 2021: *Living Green Mission* (3-7 May, Ariccia and online); Autumn Seminar 2021: *The Common Ground of Mission Today* (Mission Symposium)

Conclusion

The fact that *online Seminars* have become routine these days permits us to have a combination of the two: online and at the place itself. The organisation of this, as well as the financial arrangements for it still have to be studied. Thanks to this evolution, SEDOS can reach out to many more missionaries then before when only those resident in Rome could benefit from the activities. On the other hand, the *face to face encounters* at the seminars were always much appreciated by those living in Rome. It helped them to come home, and to meet members of other Congregations for future co-operation. The preparation of the seminars *together with other organizations* has had a positive effect on the content as well as on the number of participants.

SEDOS is in a good shape and ready to continue its Mission. Today, the Website and Bulletin serve the aspect of *Documentation*, and the Seminars and Workshops serve the aspect of *Studies*. Together we can make our common mission more effective.

SEDOS Spring Session 2021

Islam and Mission

Friday 19th of March 2021

Tentative Program

MORNING 10 – 12 am

Introduction

Fr. Markus Solo, SVD

(Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican)

Lecture I

Fr. John Mallare, CICM

(Doctor in Arabic and Islamic studies)

The Concept of Mission in Islam: Daw'a

Lecture II

Prof. Aan Rucmana

(Paramadina University, Jakarta)

How do Muslims view Catholic Mission?

AFTERNOON 2 – 5 pm

Panel session

Joys and challenges in the dialogue with Islam

ICM Sister living among muslims in Podor, Senegal

How do Muslims perceive your mission among muslims?

CICM Father working for dialogue with muslims in the diocese of Antwerp

How do Christians perceive your efforts in dialogue with Muslims?

SJ Father publishing a magazine on Christian-Muslim dialogue in India

How are Muslims and Christians working together for peace?

Panel Discussion

Closing Words

Fr. Diego Sarrió Cucarella, MAFR

(Rector of PISAI, Rome)

(to be confirmed)

Simultaneous Translations

English/Italian/Spanish/French

***For the Final Program and Online Registration,
please see SEDOS Website by the end of January.***

A Joyous Christmas & a Hope filled New Year 2021



(Greeting card from *The Printery House*, US)

**“And the angel said unto them,
Fear not: for, behold,
I bring you good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people”. (Luke 2:10)**