

Theological Week on “A Church of Women and Men”



Camaldoli Monastery, Tuscany, Italy



*“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, **besides women and children.**” (Matthew 14,21)*

It was a very enriching and profound experience: humanly and intellectually. We were around 70 participants. There also were about 10 speakers, who spent the whole week with us. Participants were a few Religious, but the majority was composed of lay women and men. Only a few people were theologians, which makes me think that most of us participated because of the theme. The Monastery organizes every year a Theological week; in collaboration with the Italian Association of Theologies (ATI) and the Women Theologians Committee (Marinella Perroni belongs to the same Committee). In the previous editions of the Theological Week, the themes were various documents of Vatican II.



All speakers were women theologians, except a monk historian and a lay man who is the President of an Italian Association of Men (Maschile Plurale), who reflects and work on masculinity and on being a man in our society. It was impossible for the organizers to find a male theologian who reflects on this Gender theme.

It is very difficult to share what I experienced, but I will try to list some points that might be useful for our reflection as a working group. We received a CD with the audio files of each talk; they are all in Italian. They also supplied us with a very good bibliography to deepen our reflection and study (see below):

- The quotation above from the Gospel of Matthew was the key part of the introductory talk: in the Church we are used to name and count men, but women are mostly unnumbered and unnamed: this has contributed to their historical invisibility;
- The key question we reflected around all week, with different positions, was: what kind of relationship do we believe there exists between nature/biology and culture/symbolic representation in the gender identity? Can we state that there exist some human characteristics that are naturally feminine or naturally masculine? Does the sex influence the development of gender? Or can gender shape the biological identity of a person? Is Jesus' way of acting masculine or feminine? Or just human? If it is so, men and women can be tender and compassionate, independently from their sex/gender...
- To summarize a long process of reflection on feminist matters we can say that a historical process might be: to distinguish (until the first World War), to be aware of diversity (until 1968), gender studies (1968-1980), gender and queer. The strongest opposition from the Catholic Church is against the “queer” position: nevertheless from the sex you were born with, you can grow and develop a different gender identity; but the queer position is more articulated, we cannot synthesize it here.



- There is a movement of lay men who are reflecting on their being men in this society; what is missing up until now is a movement of Religious men who question their being men in this patriarchal Church and society;
- Gender has been labeled as a heresy by a part of the Church (read the Document “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World”, Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith): there are various Gender theories, as there are various feminists movements, so it is not clear which of them the Church considers as most heretical (perhaps J. Butler’s position is the most targetted)
- When we talk about Gender we mean both masculine and feminine: men are not used to questioning themselves as a specific gender (mens’ studies), as women are; they talk as an universal gender that includes men and women. Working towards a better collaboration in the Church means to create spaces where women can express and share their perspective, and where men can do the same. We have to show that it is enriching and challenging working together as men and women: in this case the theoretical change comes after the experience, that shows that it is possible to work together (diverse and equals);
- Collaboration means to work as equals in opportunities, liberating our symbolic world from stereotypes that prevent women and men to live their life fully;
- According to the position of organizers, there is no theological obstacale to appointing women as diaconess or as presbyters;
- Our Church is a sex gender oriented structure: in our Church women have experienced for a very long time a gender question. We can be a feminist and believe in a Catholic God and be a disciple of our Church.
- To foster collaboration we should simply live and work together as men and women (the plural is important): we often relate each other according to a model of MAN and WOMAN we have in mind, a model that we have shaped through our culture and stereotypes and they have profound roots in us. We should learn how to concretely collaborate according to our personal skills and dreams.



Here are some authors (male and female) whose writings accompanied us all week (for further info: www.teologhe.org): Elizabeth Green, Elizabeth Johnson, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Mary Daly, J. Butler, Julia Kristeva, Simone de Beauvoir, Alaine Touraine, Olympe de Gouges, Lucy Irigaray, G. Rubin, R. W. Connell

Thank you for making this participation possible!

Patrizia

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