

## Notes on Marinella Perroni's talk on 'Women and the New Testament'

June 6, 2015

**The starting point of theological reflection** is the reality of our lives. What we are doing now is an ongoing reflection. It is the Spirit that animates our lives. There is interest and enthusiasm in reflections by women in this decade who have seen the injustice and have the ability to acknowledge it. Our concern is for the women, of men for the women, with women and for women, the transformation of women who do not live in separation from others (men); a development that is more dynamic and more open towards the future. Women are currently making history. In the men's world, the focus is on the present and the *status quo*. If we commit to a more just world, then we need to have a proactive attitude toward the world, a more just world.

**From the perspective of Methodology** – The title given to me is that of Women AND the New Testament instead of Women in the New Testament. There is political interest; women relate to the New Testament in their lives to be more faithful to the Gospel they have received. The New Testament? It is a collection of writings classified in 4 Gospels, Letters, and the Acts of the Apostles. The Books of the NT were not written outside history; it is the fruit of prophetic reflection. Women and the NT is not something written in stone. The Vatican II Council was the fruit of the Spirit inside the life of the community, fruit of the apostolic activity of the Spirit, of the prophets within the community itself.

The world of women and the NT: women have their own religious formation, culture, age. The NT are writings deposited within accounts in the Acts and Pauline letters, of the apostolic tradition from the first Apostolic preaching to the second Apostolic preaching. The Gospels have different authors who address the concerns differently from the end of the first century. Because the times have changed, this has led the writers to look at women in a different way; there were also different needs.

**From apostolic tradition to post-apostolic tradition:** Today, while women are on the periphery, we are moved to the center when Pope Francis came, we are more in the center now but churches have matured in time. How did the Churches develop? How have they changed? Is the role played by women an evolution or an involution? It is more universally accepted that there has been an involution. Women were very active and fruitful because it was the first apostolic preaching and then they were in another phase to configure themselves in an institutional way. The texts say so, there is a distinction between tradition and writings, passages from apostolic tradition to post-apostolic tradition. Think of what it means in a Western world where democracy involves difference in the issue of power held by a woman. What were the roles of women in the first century?

Women were not allowed to preach. There is a theology of gender. In the millenary tradition, even if we have overcome this, I would keep it alive because it has not been addressed. The Acts of the Apostles is an apologetic at the end of the first century. It was about the social and cultural institutionalization of the Roman world presented in a most plausible way. Christianity is not simply one among the many but Christianity inspired to enter the Roman world. In the modern times, this would be presentation and marketing. Luke tells the reality and makes it more presentable. In the Acts, the apostles are Peter and Paul. For Luke the intention is to present preachers, to institutionalize and present male apostles. However, there is a series of testimonies that we can use in order to reconstruct the reality. The author of Acts presents women from the beginning of Christianity and there are numerous allusions that Christianity DID NOT exclude women. Conversion and baptism was open to all, not only to the Gentiles but both men and women alike. In Acts 9, Paul is in Damascus in the synagogue.

a) *Tabitha* – was responsible for a group of widows; there was already a group of women with their structure led by Tabitha with independent source of income. This group was acknowledged by citizens of the community when Tabitha dies. Peter is called to resurrect her. This narration of Peter leads us to acknowledge this group of self-sufficient women, not only of the resuscitation of Tabitha.

b) *Lidia* – Acts 16:13 – In the local church in Phillippi. Lidia was a rich trader, merchant of purple cloth, of Hellenized Judaic tradition. Reference is part of the community of Phillippi, while Paul and Barnabas turned to the synagogue. Lidia is already a believer, worshipper of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit – to be baptized with her whole family; a widow, bread earner of the family.

c) *Damaris* – Acts 17:34 - Paul preached in Athens among the Areopagus, 2-3 people believed in Paul who rooted Christianity in Athens one of whom was Damaris.

d) *Women and communities:*

- *Maria* – Acts 12:12-15 - In Jerusalem, ‘one heart and soul’ – an ideal situation wished by the apostles, who later experienced the distancing of Peter. Peter is arrested, jailed. Peter moves from Jerusalem to the ‘sea’. Maria is told to go tell the disciples that I am going away.
- *Priscilla in Ephesus* - Acts 18: 2,18,26 - Aquila’s wife. In some situations, her name was mentioned first then Aquila. She was the dominating personality and they were dealers of cloth in Corinth and were acknowledged by the community.

Reference points – Paul takes Priscilla, Aquila and cooperators to Ephesus; they gather the Christian communities because they had funds – ‘have to be grateful to Priscilla and Aquila’

– Paul. Priscilla and Aquila knew the stories of Jesus from John’s disciples. Note the mobility of Paul – he was very good, spoke in the synagogue; believers there only knew the baptism of Jesus. They explained the Word of God, discussed, debated; did Christian preaching that was more complete. Apollo also had a group.

➤ Philip’s daughters: 4 daughters who had the gift of prophesying. Philip was an evangelist, one of the 7 who distanced themselves from the apostles. These were very interesting beginnings of the Church.

**Second input:** When we started feminist theology in Italy, we were ‘under the US world’, kept to the margins 40 years ago. Today, Pope Francis speeded it up with the Catholic hierarchy who would always say ‘woman’ not ‘women’. There is a blossoming of seminars today. E.g. Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace; Cardinal Ravasi organized one on Women’s Culture, organized by the Catholic hierarchy. Because we are theologians, we should ‘stay’ as a small group of theologians. Theology is an important perspective and we are invited to offer it in the lay context. It is not true that women are not interested in it; it is not enough to say ‘woman’, then go to the periphery. It is important to grow, to talk about ‘women’ to live in a social context to open the future for others.

**Double Personality of Paul:** I want to talk about Paul who is accused of misogyny and who has become the target of women scholars in the NT. Who is the true Paul? Who is the Paul that is being interpreted? There is Paul and Pauline Tradition. Paul is said to have a double face. His was the passing of a generation, an ecclesial generation. *Paul was always a missionary*, characterized as one with openness and without discrimination, in dialogue. And there is *Paul, the apostle*, who had to take care of his churches. He does not want a perfect church but a responsible church.

Paul helped the different communities develop from Judaic roots. Paul actually shows in what he wrote that he is proud of what the women did. He knew that faith in Jesus Christ has never excluded anybody. Paul is the only one who used ‘gender theology’ – men and women participate in the same Christianity in God. Paul does not make it up; he remembers – ‘you have been baptized (circumcision excludes the women which in the Jewish Tradition includes this patriarchal activity) All of you are sons of God through baptism – ‘clothe yourselves with Christ’ – no Jew or Gentile, no free or slave, no men or women. Baptism in Christ does not allow discrimination – ‘no male or female.’ The call to Christ eliminates difference – male and female are functional to the species (procreation). In the Kingdom of God, there is no men or women, this no longer exists.

**Romans 16** – A shared missionary responsibility, a note written by someone else, not Paul; a conclusion to the Letter to the Romans. Paul explains that he is connected to different places. He wrote this letter to show that his theology has all the credit for being an apostle of Jesus Christ. His network is well supported by the Christians themselves. Women traveled to the Mediterranean 73 times to support his cause. He used ‘my co-workers, beloved one, dear one, brothers, saints’, a list of all the important people. Women are called and given the roles they have:

1) Phoebe, our sister, *diakono*, received in the Church in Rome, helper in our work. A **deaconess** is one who is at the service of the church in anything the community may need – hospitality, etc., whatever she has to carry out. Phoebe is a messenger who would continue the mission of Paul in Rome. He describes her as a benefactor, *patrone*, leading in the missionary activity protecting ‘including myself’ helping the mission, the protector of the role played in the meetings.

2) “Greet Priscilla and Aquila”, my co-workers in mission in Jesus Christ. Paul was imprisoned due to his missionary activities and all the Gentiles, Priscilla and Aquila among them - took the responsibility for the local church. Mary, Trefora, the four women are mentioned and the word ‘toils’ is used by Paul to mean they ‘labored’ a lot for the building of the Church’ missionary labor/role of those who have labored for the Lord, an apostolic role, evangelizing role. The passage also mentions a woman – Junia; apostles, my relatives, companions in prison. He continues: “I did not baptize them; they were apostles before I came.” Paul entered a lively network, which he acknowledged. Paul was not against women but as a missionary, he needed to address some ‘issues’ in the Christian communities.

3) The second face of Paul: Man should not cover his head since he is the image of God; every woman must cover her head since woman is the image of man. (1 Cor 11:7-12). Man did not come from woman but woman from man. There is asymmetry here. The symmetry is expressed in: submit one to another; asymmetry: wives should submit themselves to their husbands. Functional roles – women are to dress properly, this is like a law to regulate the behavior of women.

4) Re prophecy of men and women. Paul exhorts that women must keep silence in church; they are not permitted to speak. (1 Cor 14:34 – 35) Paul has a clear issue with the assembly, he had to put some boundaries and roles. The word of Paul has become the universal law of the Church; the Corinthians has become the norm of the Church. 1 Cor:14 has become the basis of tradition until today.

5) 1 Timothy 1: 8 – 15: A woman should learn from men; teaching was a role of power. A re-reading of the Fall concludes that Eve was guilty and women will be saved by childbearing. ‘I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency.’

6) Tertullian – writings on dresses of women; sexual relations with someone outside marriage. Man: ‘he will be your owner’; ‘you are the door of the devil.’

7) Tradition selects according to needs. In post-Pauline writings, there was accusation of women and their marginalization.

***Question and Answer:***

1) Please comment on what the Vatican means by ‘feminine genius’ and ‘complementarity of men and women’ Feminine genius – is what is meant by the stereotype of women that women are nurturing, etc. The ‘rib’ indicates a patriarchal connotation of inequality although ‘rib’ really means to reproduce the symmetry, that the woman is equal to man. Not ‘complementarity’ but ‘symmetry’ why are women paid less i.e. 25% of men’s salary?

2) Inclusion of women in society

3) Strategy – Does the church value women only as a strategy or is it truly the Church’s aim?

2 & 3: The word ‘strategy’ could be interpreted as ‘desire’. The Church is held as a model of society but where the society aims at ‘inclusion’ the church keeps the ‘exclusion’. Is the Church today open to inclusion or to dramatic homophobia, a symbolic frontier? Mentioned Cardinal Parolin’s comment on the referendum in Ireland which came out ‘yes’ for same-sex marriage: ‘a defeat for humanity’, a ‘debacle’. What if in the future, instead of a man of the Church, in 3050, a woman will come out at the balcony? What is apostolic intelligence? We will go on.

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