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The Feminine Representation in the discourse of the Liberation Theology

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For over a century, the linguistic and paralinguistic knowledge gives us the certainty that language shapes us. Edward Sapir said in 1921:

As soon as the word is ready, we felt instinctively, with a sort of sigh of relief, that also the concept is ready for us to handle ... Are we as ready to die for "freedom" to fight for our "ideal" if the words themselves were not ringing within us? And the word, as we know, is not only a key, it can also be an obstacle. (Sapir 1966, p. 23).

You cannot think without language and each language, like every speech, makes its ownership and understanding of what we call the real and at the same time configures its expression.

Theology, in the same way that all fields of science andgnoseological reflection, builds its knowledge to the extent that it develops its own *set of language*, speaking in terms of Wittgenstein. Here, the used language is not *neutral or transparent*; on the contrary, it determines the experiences and the religious practices from the representations made. From those same representations determines the construction of identities – individual and collective – and the search of oneself.

Let us follow Elizabeth Johnson, renowned American theologian, in her statements:

The unfathomable mystery of God has always been under the mediation of the changing historical discourse. The language about God has history. If we note those changes in both the scriptural term as well as following along with history, we realize that there has not been a timeless language about God in the Jewish and Christian traditions. We have to think better that words about God are cultural creatures, interwoven traditions, and avatars of the faith community that uses them. As cultures change, the specificity of language about God changes. (Johnson 2002, p. 21).

Approaches to The Divinity are crossed by social practices, ideologies, and the cultural episteme from which *we talk and think*.

Regarding our study, the theological constructions of Christian tradition have gestated and developed into the patriarchal system in which we live, move, and exist.

Although most of the time, but not always, women have been excluded from the theological work and as a result, they have failed to widely develop their own proposals in this direction and above all, they have not been passed down their own inheritance. But going back to the Middle Ages, we find that some authors and thinkers broke with institutionalized ideologies and found their own paths to name the *Mystery*, to that *transcendent Energy* which they wanted to approach. For we must say that women cannot always be identified with an HE transcendent because her sexuality and gender cannot find a mirror. Therefore, either the transcendent allows them their own serious and profound search, or they should get away from the supposedly common paradigm.

The theologians of past centuries always approached that reality called *God* differently than men. Names like Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich Hadewijch of Ambers, are a clear example of this. Instead of the *rationalized* and *scholastic* discourse, these women spoke of the Divine in terms of metaphors, visions, and experiences, which did not prevent that they bequeathed coherent and profound treaties to us on the aspects of the transcendence that they approached. With the advancement and the predominance of Thomistic dogma, these languages and these thinkers were excluded from theological work, were silenced, and were occasionally relegated under the ambiguous name of the *mystical*.

Ruptures in the Liberation Theology

The theology of liberation (LT) was initially developed in Latin America in the sixties and was systematized in its initial intuitions by the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez. It is a theological discourse, which falls mostly on the trunk of Catholic-European theology. From a new starting point, the view from the poor, some assumptions of political theology developed in the mid-twentieth century in Europe and are referred to rethinking. Traditionally, the theology built its speech from philosophical assumptions. However, a key rupture in this new theological practice is to rely on the economy and the social sciences to their proposals.

The liberation theology poses the need for interdisciplinary regard to social theories. It is what we might call a social analytic mediation. Then it postulates a positive, contextual, and concrete knowledge of society. From there comes his criticism of the speculative and abstract thinking that she considers ahistorical and alienating. The mediation of social analysis is then presented

as a requirement of the practice of faith, to the extent that it wants to be an incarnated faith. (Boff 1980, p. 15).

This requirement got the LT enrolled in a realistic and objective manner in the everyday world and from there, to rethink the big questions that always addressed theological thinking.

The LT supports communities of Christians (men and women) in its commitment to release various processes of liberation on the continent and in this regard, the popular women felt supported in their struggles for a better living for their families. About the debate on the validity or otherwise of this theological proposal, it is necessary to note the economic and social conditions of injustice that led to its birth and how its development has not been transformed and that we should talk about its validity. But we must also bear in mind that the processes of identity construction of social subjects have indeed changed and maybe the sub-continent theologians have not given it due consideration.

Another especially significant shift was the proposal to Gustavo Gutierrez, of doing theology *from the other side of history*. Conceptual approach to long ranges:

Live and think the faith from the absence of history reframes the way of understanding the salvific message of the Gospel. Placed squarely in the world of oppression, participate in popular struggles for liberation leads to rereading the faith; but that rereading means a different location in history from that of the dominant sectors of society. (Gutierrez 1977, p. 35).

This look transforms the analyses, the assumptions, and the paths of knowledge. It is about a starting point that enables much more to understand the historical dynamics and the enrollment in this dynamic of the forces driving the religious-social. This approach of *the reverse of history* brings consequences in different areas of approximation and explanation of the reality. Consequences that led the LT to propose alternative ways to traditional theological thinking and most importantly, led her to accompany struggles and demands of many social groups of Abyayala. However, in the field of women as subjects, no progress was made which would have been postponed. *Looking at history from the reverse*, it remains in full force necessary in an increasingly unequal world. But to look at history from the reverse also means- in a patriarchal world -to look at it from the women perspective that is so often ignored, silenced, and excluded.

WOMEN in this paradigm

To illustrate our approach we can take an example almost at random: Consider one of the most popular *Dictionaries of Liberation*

Theology in the subcontinent. The one edited by Diego Medellin Ecumenical Center of Chile in 1992.

The word *woman* does not appear among the dictionary entries (Rosales and Ferari 1992), on the contrary: blacks, mestizos, poor, poverty ... Of course, also not shown is the term Gender, or any other entry that point to think there is a difference in sexual diversity. It is not a simple oversight; this omission is because although women were the overwhelming majority within the Christian Base Communities, they really were never *seen* as a *subject* within this long and complex road. It never looked at women with autonomy, with needs, rights, and own expectations. The term *Mary of Nazareth*, definitely important in contemporary theological feminine look, is also ignored.

However, borrowing a concept of Bourdieu, we can speak of the *theological field*, in a similar form to the *literary or artistic field* (cfr. Bourdieu 1995). The facts are not unambiguous or transparent, they are nonlinear and simple ... Inside of the theology we analyze the contradictions and opposing forces that were developed. One of the most important works of summary of this thought was the one carried out by Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, under the name *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental concepts of the theology of the liberation* (Ellacuría and Sobrino 1990). In it we find the article: *The woman's theology in the theology of the liberation*, written by Ana María Tepedino and Margarida L. Ribeiro Brandão.

The authors collected in this essay the steps that were taken to the interior of the necessary tensions of gender. Since 1985 the theologians of Latin America met periodically to advance in their searches. Always to the inside of the same paradigm. In this sense the mentioned authors explain:

Latin American theologians, in their pastoral and Christian experience, learn that the option for the poor is summed up in the option for the poor woman, who is now the poorest among the poor. In them, the women's force transformation can be summarized as resistance to survive, and creativity to find their new place in society and as freedom that, in the religious sense, means to live and talk about God. (Tepedino Ribeiro 1990, p. 295).

The woman is being *referred to* ... in this case the poor, and she is not looked or discovered in herself.

Ivone Gebara taking some steps forward proposed:

Women attempt in their theological work to recover the existential realities, leaving them to talk freely and allowing them to reorganize from the current context, for only then link them to an older tradition. By this method we attempt to give back to the theological language its ability to touch some vital centers of human existence. In other words, this procedure is equivalent,

in a sense, to return to the theology the poetic dimension of the existence, since the deepest of the human being is only expressed by analogy; the mystery is only formulated in poetry; the gratuitousness is only translated through symbols. (Gebara 1994, p. 21).

And here we in fact encounter the limits of this theological speech from the feminist perspective.

Languages and imaginary

The TL remained and remains bound to masculine and patriarchal conceptions of the Divinity. And therein lies the main problem that women do not feel comfortable under this umbrella. Therefore major disruptions resided and were carried out by some feminist theologies. In projects and theoretical reflections of Latin America, the problem of language on Divinity, their images and symbols are never addressed. There has always prevailed and still prevails an approach to God that while liberating and loving, is primarily a male: *The God of the poor, the God of history, the liberating God of the Exodus ...* Progress regarding previous non-incarnational theologies, but in no case a house for *the woman in herself and for herself*. The LT gave great importance to the images: pictorial, songs, and poems. There was a lot of creativity but these poetic constructions – very enriching and sometimes aesthetically beautiful – failed to talk FROM and TO the woman herself.

The imaginaries constitute us with the same force as the lived experiences because these experiences we read from ... and turn them in... on those imaginaries. The religious imaginary accompany permanently – consciously or unconsciously – the construction of our identity:

Psychology and anthropology have shown how the use of exclusively masculine symbols of God prevents women from developing their full humanity. Jungian psychologist Toni Wolff described the negative consequences of this situation for the feminist psyche. She explains: "The imagination of God represents the ultimate symbol of the best human characteristics and the most profound ideas of the human spirit. How can a woman find herself if her own psychic fundamentals are not objectified in a symbol? The symbol will show its effect in humans, developing its meaning over time, little by little." (Seibert 2010, p. 72).

The theological task has to be understood as a very tentative and stammering approach to the Divinity, that in order to construct metaphors of approximation, it is necessary to respond to groups and social subjects from which it thinks. The purpose is to propose to the non-specialized people concepts and realities that slip and escape. The traditional exclusion suffered by women of the thought and the theological expression has contributed to the representation of God that has always been in mas-

culine terms. The traditional exclusion that women have suffered from the thought and theological expression has contributed to the representation of God being always expressed in masculine terms. Christian theology has taken shape in a patriarchal womb and therefore understood as *natural* and beyond official declarations, God has no sex. This, however, has always been conceived as a male. This fact leaves women out of an imaginary that constitutes them in their being of women, allowing them a full identification with their sexuality. That leaves them in a dead-end.

As Carol P. Christ says very well:

The religions centered on the worship of a male God create "dispositions of spirit" and "motivations" that maintain women in a state of psychological dependence on men and masculine authority and, at the same time, legitimize the political and social authority of parents and children in social institutions. The symbolic religious systems centered exclusively on masculine images of the Divinity create the impression that the power of the women can never be totally legitimate or beneficial. This message does not have to be explicitly delivered (for example in the story of Eva) to feel its effects. A woman who completely ignores biblical myths of feminine wickedness recognizes, nevertheless, the anomaly of feminine power when she prays exclusively to a male God. She can see herself like God (created in the image of God) only if she denies her sexual identity. But she will never be able to have the experience that automatically enjoys every man and child of her culture, of fully affirming her sexual identity by feeling made in the image and likeness of God. (Christ 1997, pp. 161-162).

Therefore a religious practice that has on its horizon the configuration of the feminine subject will have to find an approach to the mystery and to the transcendence that is inclusive, and as the universal and abstract do not *touch* the most intimate fibers of the I, it is necessary an appropriation and a development of all expressions of sexuality and generic construction. If we speak of the *God of the poor*, we have to ask ourselves what happens when a poor woman suffers violence by her sexual companion who is committed to the paths of the base ecclesial communities ... How does this woman experience that God is on her side, that God loves her and accompanies her, that God wants her to grow and establish self-assertion? How to experience God that is not an accomplice – as that of the male – of his "committed" partner that speaks of that God very properly? These are questions that the Theology of Liberation never formulated and therefore never responded to.

As we saw in the example of the *Diccionario*, the LT never *mentions* the woman and with those that are not named, there are two possibilities: either they simply do not exist or they are converted into *symptoms* that are repressed. Not naming is not recognizing and not recognizing is not

to be aware of the consciousness of the existence of the silenced; this as a starting point and forward follows a path of ignorance and radical misunderstanding. Over the course of at least three decades, the Latin American theological discourse never utilized an inclusive language, but international organizations such as UNESCO, the UN, and educational platforms advance over this field.

Some of the limits of the LT, for example, are its poor understanding of the different *subjectivities* that have to do precisely with the fact of having unknown the female knowledge, way to learn, and study. Its theological matrix did not assume a *feminine look* that would have made understanding possible by other means.

The feminist theology implied and supposed a qualitative leap with respect to previous theologies concerning both epistemological starting points as in thinking and processing the imaginary; therefore, it assumes the language as one of its *field of fights*. It is not about stirring some things so that everything is equal, but it is about giving to believing women and using tools for the construction of their identity in the radically self-affirming sense. As it raises Dorothee Sölle:

The feminist theology does not try to exchange pronouns, but to conceive a different manner of transcendence: a transcendence that does not have to be understood as the independence of everything and the dominion over all other things, but to be bound to the weave of life ...It is necessary an approximation to the mystic, which is the one that more widely has surpassed the hierarchical and masculine understanding of God, that is, a mystic which does not let the thirst for real liberation be lost in the sea of the unconscious. (Sölle 1996, p. 60).

An interesting work in this regard is made by the North American theologian Sallie McFague. The starting point of this author is the certainty that there is a break in the language about God and that it is necessary to perform ruptures that lead to a more realistic connection with the women and men of the twenty-first century because the reference to the transcendent mystery has ceased to be not only interesting but viable in the present world. It is a challenge then to get new approaches that are far more telling. She commits in taking brave risks in this regard:

It has become more and more painfully evident to many Westerners (within the Judeo-Christian tradition as for those outside them, but they have been influenced by their iconography, values, and concepts) that the used language to express the relationship between God and the world needs a revision. In my opinion, this revision must begin at the imagination's level, a mental experiment with those metaphors – and the corresponding concepts – and unlike those used mainly by tradition, propose a unified and interdependent framework for understanding the relationships between the God-world and the human being-world. (McFague 1994, p. 48).

Her exposition is to reclaim a theological discourse of metaphorical and apophatic type.

In this way, feminist theology can reencounter with the language about God elaborated by medieval women and mystics of different times whose spiritual consciousness led them to experience God as a mystery and therefore used metaphors and visions to refer exclusively to the transcendence.

Bibliography

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