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Presentation

The Ecumenical Association of Theologians of the Third World, EATWOT (in spanish Asociación Ecu mica de Te logos y te logas del tercer mundo -ASETT), from its Committee of Latin American women, wishes to express through this issue of the Theological Journal VOICES, the efforts which are being made in many parts of the world and particularly in those places traditionally called "Third World" –though we know the globalized reality has made evident the existence of first worlds in third worlds and viceversa-, so that women's voices are heard and their search and efforts for the recognition of their dignity, the same as that of males, are not kept silent.

A long way has been covered in the last decades. From the 60's, the work of feminist theologians and biblical experts is evident, struggling for a place for women in the church, the liturgy and theology and not any presence, but that which will give them back the dignity that "machismo" and androcentrism present now have denied them for centuries, and that will allow them an effective and affective participation in all public areas.

The fruits of this work can be seen in many publications and in the interest it has arisen. Nevertheless, the road is hard since, though there are more open areas to women, this does not reach all women in all places and because the androcentric mentality cannot be changed so easily and continues to guide the search and realizations of both men and women. We cannot say there is a homogeneous path in the feminist theological search, or a lineal development. But the creativity, insistence, audacity and many other attitudes that go together with this search are evident and through persistence they open new roads.

The papers published here come from different places and express some of the challenges experienced in those areas. As it has been common in the feminist theology, some start from the experience of women (and men), others from the importance and force language has in the

changes required and in the possibility of opening new roads, apart from the already known biblical pursuits in which the prominence of women in the first christian communities attest the urgency of not only opening a place but also reclaiming what in fact was there in the beginnings and which institutional patriarchy erased and finally eliminated.

Many other topics could have been dealt with but the purpose is not to cover topics but to continue insisting that the presence of women in society and the Church cannot continue to have a second place but should develop with all the richness its presence implies, not limited to the sphere usually given to women –intuition, kindness, sensibility, care, etc.-, but also to all the human dynamism that creates and enables human development, technological, scientific, holistic and that is capable of looking for alternatives for a world in true reciprocity not only among human beings but also in communion with all of creation so as to make this “common house” sustainable, a house we share and that the Lord entrusted us to be co-creators of a world which from the beginning He/She saw “as good” (Gn 1,31).

We hope these papers are a boost to continue the feminist theological task from the realization that the basic equality between male and female is not a trendy topic, a whim of some women, a fight already overcome, or a movement which is still stigmatized. This fundamental equality is dear to God, thought by him from the beginnings of creation and an unwavering aspect for the realization of the Kingdom of God. This is not a women only task, it is the task of all those who take on the cause of humanity –which is the cause of God- in their hands and work to make it possible.

From **Korea, Meehyun Chung**, in her paper *Militarism and gender in Korea*, analyzes the situation of the two Koreas where civil war between them has left as inheritance a militarist mentality which appears in everyday life. The political situation justifies the militarist system and promotes a culture of militarism in both the micro and macro social levels. This paper shows this situation from the perspective of gender, in particular that of the sexual workers in the American camps with their children. They are turned into “the others” in their own country because there is no State protecting them against the abuses the military foreigners living in Korea perform. What is more, because of the tradition of “blood purity” existing in this country, children born from American military are not accepted and most of the times their only future is in adoption.

Stories such as the adulterous woman in John’s gospel, show how this mentality of accusing only the woman without questioning the man who is also committing adultery, is repeated in the case of sexual workers

because they are the only to be stigmatized and rejected. South Korea promotes an anti-communist mentality which is taught in all places including churches, what makes it even more difficult to build fraternity and reconciliation bonds. Capitalism, militarism are not denounced forcefully, and the experience of faith is oriented towards the salvation of the individual soul more than the prophetic denounce of all this situation marked by the dominant capitalist policies and military interests.

Isabel Corpas de Posada, from **Colombia**, shares her paper *Intimacy and eroticism in the works of past century mystics*, in which she has a theological approach to the mystic language that expresses a communion experience from the texts of six women mystics, challenging such language for the world of today. She will make reference to some texts by Hadewijch of Ambers and Gertrudis of Helftle (from the Middle Ages). Both authors express their relation and union with God with a direct spousal language and evocative of the language in the Song of Songs. Another mystic she makes reference to is Saint Therese of Jesus, from the XVI century, who also uses conjugal symbolism to express what her soul feels when united with God. From the XVII century and from another environment, non cloistered, she refers to Anne Marie van Schurmann and Jeanne de Guyon. From the first she rescues self-denial through sacrifice to open up to God and make the union with him possible, an experience that produces pleasure. From the latter she shows the nuptial symbolism as a spiritual itinerary for the union of the soul with God, dying to the self to revel in God. Finally she refers to Francisca Josefa del Castillo of the neo-Granadian colonial baroque, who as the other mystics used nuptial symbolism to express her encounter with God.

With this proof of the language that expresses the mystic experience, the author shows how all these mystics, immersed in a patriarchal context, were able to subvert the established order putting on paper their experiences and doing that with a language of erotic love. And she questions if that type of relation with God is still valid in this XXI century, concluding that maybe the language is less daring but the experience of communion persists because that is the essence of christian life. The paper ends establishing a relationship between that experience of communion and the compromise with the poorest, experience which today is called as mysticism with open eyes, understanding it from within and from below, marked by an effective compromise of solidarity towards the poor.

Ivone Gebara's paper, *Spirituality and resistance: a Latin American Feminist Perspective*, gives from **Brazil** a rich analysis over the way women, without denying their religion of origin, are looking for other spiritual paths that can reinterpret the religious values beyond the

traditional ways as transmitted in the churches governed by men. She sees language as one of the challenges of this XXI century where plurality of meanings shows words do not have one sole valid interpretation for all times, actually they transmit the richness of human interaction which creates meanings and these depend on the experiences and relations established between persons. It is in this context that we may think of spirituality and resistance, the first understood as the best manifestations of our humanity and the second as the capacity to resist evil and fight against all types of oppression. The paper wants to show how words need to be thought again because we live a complex process full of contradictions and easy certainties and as Sigmund Bauman says, a liquid society with liquid meanings.

The author, from the experience of women in Latin America, wishes to show how resistance is now a source and result of a spiritual change taking place. This change is due to the awareness of connecting one's reality to spirituality and hence the awareness of fighting for justice, denouncing any type of violence against women, saying a word different from the establishment, becomes a spiritual experience as valid as the one traditionally lived in the official churches. These experiences are true spiritual experiences which were not recognized by the liberation theology, since it only considered the economic and not all these other oppressions that affect women so much. The spirituality connected to life and daily struggles, concretely of the most poor women, makes it possible to open paths beyond the institutional and discover new experiences and roads that are fertile for the better development of all.

From **Chile**, **Diego Irarrázaval** offers us a contribution on masculinities in his article *Femininity in Men*, where, based on several authors he affirms that men have more masculine qualities and an interior feminine energy. Giving up control above other persons and the history, and through relationships, it is possible to build new masculinities which allow the femininity to emerge and recreate all aspects of the masculine personality, giving an amazing testimony of the Beatitudes, becoming an efficient collaborator and never a sacred oppressor. When one accepts the kingdom of God's love, one is capable of rejecting the omnipotent structures. To assume the feminine qualities is not a difficult task as one becomes able to live the Gospel from such qualities: to part the food, to opt for justice, to heal pain, to trust God, to love with no idolatries.

From **Brazil**, **Mercedes Lopes**, gives us *The role of Martha in the Joanine community*, as part of the present experience of feminicide, which is growing due to the present awareness of this situation, consequence of a patriarchal system that makes women invisible in the social

and ecclesiastical areas. Within this context to rescue the character of Martha in John's gospel is to talk of hope, courage and dignity, for her clear faith in the God of Jesus and her capacity to trust in the force of life when this is deteriorated. The situation of John's community was of oppression from the Romans and Lazarus' death may symbolize this. But the presence of the women is proactive and Martha represents it. She questions if Martha would be the loved disciple and to respond to this she gives a more detailed study of the text.

The disciple category is basic in John's gospel. Equivalent to that of apostle in the synoptics. The gospel introduces the name of Martha before that of Lazarus and Mary and makes the confession of faith from Martha a central point: "Yes Master, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God alive". In this way in John, Martha occupies Peter's place in Mathew's gospel. Hence, in the horizon of the God Sophia tradition, John shows the active participation of women in the community and their prominence in the confession of faith. Martha's confession expresses the apostolic faith and reveals the important role Martha had in John's community, acknowledging Peter's role, but stressing that the commitment to Jesus is more important.

From **Indonesia**, **Agustine Nunuk P. Murniati**, presents her paper *Another world is possible*, making use of the name of the World Forums, in which she participated in 2009, because she states that the strategy to change the world can only be through a socio cultural movement. In this movement there was a campaign, and solidarity communities came together and were supported. But, what is the real meaning of that expression? Maybe the Kingdom announced by Jesus which implies the liberation from all oppression included that of the patriarchal culture and gender stereotypes. But this liberation is not easy because the cultural impact is so big that we mistake what is the wish of God with what is created by human beings. Looking at the origins, with the garden of Eden, women and men divided tasks and there was no possession of one over the other. But the idol of power has overtaken us and capitalism changed values. It is necessary to recover the original values, to find the feminist potential with all the ideas and wisdom of the foremothers.

In Asia feminism is not women's stuff but it is starting to appear as their conscience when looking at their situation. But this is an imperative for all for the growth of humanity. It must discern the religious views because many times they have contributed to the subordination of women and are an epistemological process arising from the fairness of our being. Feminism in Asia has been oriented more by a secularization process and needs to be introduced more into the Asian worldwide

which is more sacral. Prophets of Judaism inspire the Asian woman to fight against all oppression, following the example of Mary of Nazareth as a prophet. Besides, Jesus' practice shows his different behavior towards those marginalized and particularly towards women. Another world is possible, therefore, a new world, a new Eden that comes from following Jesus and his announcement of the Kingdom. We are called to offer an alternative for the future. We must foster international solidarity with a prophetic mission of following Jesus.

From **Colombia**, **Carmina Navia** gives us a paper called *The Feminine Representation in the Theology of Liberation*, which deals with one of the big problems between this theology and the feminist theology. On the one hand, although the theologians of liberation recognized the situation of oppression of the poor, they were unable to include the female view and express solidarity with her fight and movements towards her liberation. Starting from the importance given today to language due to its power to shape individuals, it shows how in the big works of the theology of liberation words such as woman, gender, Mary of Nazareth, etc., so dear to the feminists were not included. At the same time the works of some women theologians about the importance of a more existential and poetic language –much more used by women–, was not taken into account as it should have been.

Neither has the problem of the masculine language about God been dealt with sufficiently and though the theology of liberation was very creative through poetry, songs, etc., it did not consider women. To prioritize this masculine language about God prevented women to recognize themselves in the divinity because they cannot identify themselves with him. What is not mentioned does not exist. A poor understanding of the subjectivities, mainly the feminine view which would allow to understand reality from other standpoints, has been a noticeable shortage in the theology of liberation. For this reason the feminist theology was a step forward from these theologies and took language as one of its fields of battle, not only as an exchange of pronouns, but as something deeper looking for a way to talk about God for women and men of the XXI century for whom the transcendent mystery has stopped being not only interesting but also viable in the present world.

From **Colombia** too, and referring to the Popular Reading of the Bible, the paper by **Mary Betty Rodríguez**, *Dei Verbum, a popular reading of the Bible and women*, shows how Dei Verbum opened up paths to new ways of approaching the biblical text, not because the document deals with the popular reading of the Bible but because it introduces fresh air that was welcomed by the Latin-American and

Caribbean Episcopal Conferences, mainly the Conference of Medellin. Many bishops committed to the poor attended this Conference, which made the appearance of the Basic Ecclesial Communities that have been mostly constituted by women. They started to see in the biblical texts the presence and action of God on them and little by little the feminist biblical hermeneutics appeared to help them become aware of themselves as historical subjects, though oppressed and discriminated, but with a liberation perspective. It was not simple for these women to have their views welcomed. Presently there are various groups where the Popular Reading of the Bible continues and in them the women continue to read the Bible from their standpoint, not silencing their prophetic voice and having the Bible as a reference, despite the fact that the church resists a greater participation of women in it.

From **Brazil**, **Luiza E. Tomita**, the paper *Feminist theology on eco-feminist practices in Latin America: problems and challenges in the 21st century*, wants to display the inferior situation of women in society and in church due to the dominant patriarchal ideology. At this age of concern about ecology and the ecosystem protection, women are also doing their best to enter this enterprise. For them it is not hard to be a protector of the ecosystem as they have always been identified with nature, while men were identified with culture and sciences. For this reason, they have begun a type of *solidary economy* which is an alternative way to generate income and to enable their survival as well as their children's. Moreover, this type of economy does not harm the ecosystem as it enables an ecologically sustainable form of development.

Another fact is that the feminist theology has found out the close connection of the women's body and nature in what refers to the reproductive process which is controlled by the patriarchal institutions to continue their domination over women's body.

Another paper that makes reference to a woman in the Bible belongs to **Socorro Vivas**, *The ministry of Mary Magdalen. A performative referent for women today*. From **Colombia**, the author presents Mary Magdalen so that women in the Church today can find elements that are invigorating, probing and performative. Mary Magdalen is presented as an apostle, as the loved disciple, possessed by seven demons, a woman with no family bonds, a woman that attests to the death of Jesus, a woman that is witness to the resurrection –“I have seen the Lord”-, a woman who experiences the fear of declaring that Jesus resurrected, and the image of repentant sinner which has to be cleared because it lies in the popular imagination but in the canonical gospels this woman is not Mary Magdalen.

In a second stage she refers to Mary Magdalen within the circle of apostles in relation to the present debate about the ordination of women. From biblical data, with all the limitations it has, it can be concluded that Mary Magdalen complies with all the conditions to be disciple and her position has the same responsibilities as that of Peter. Today there is a debt to women in the sense of recognizing their role and giving them a place in decision taking. Finally, language plays a fundamental role and hence the way we talk of Mary Magdalen shows our way of understanding her. To take care of the language and to clear the wrong imagination that have been placed on her, is to help towards another way of valuing women and their role in the ecclesiastical ministries.

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