

Pilar de Miguel

The Women's Movements and Feminist Theology: Reviewing the Context in Spain

Introduction

The Song of Questions

Mother, asks the clever daughter,
who are our mothers?
Who are our ancestors?
What is our history?
Give us our name. Name our genealogy.

Mother, asks the wicked daughter,
if I learn my history
will I not be angry?
Will I not be bitter as Miriam
who was deprived of her prophecy?

Mother, asks the simple daughter,
if Miriam lies buried in the sand,
why must we dig up those bones?
Why must we remove her from sun and stone
where she belongs?

The one who knows not how to question
she has no past,
she has no present,
she has no future
without knowing her mothers,
without knowing her angers,
without knowing her questions.¹

¹ E. M. Broner and Nomi Nimrod, "A Woman's Passover Haggadah". Quoted by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said. Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Beacon Press: Boston 1992), 167.

On many occasions, and also when preparing this address, I have felt like the wicked or the simple daughter, as we all do on so many occasions, but at the same time I am, I have firmly resolved and I invite you to be the clever daughter.²

I am particularly happy about this endeavour to claim memory, because memory is very weak and many people exploit this situation, both to determine correct political thinking and to support dominant powers of all kinds. You will hear them saying, “That is the situation, and what exists is the best possibility,” etc.; attempting to subject us to what Amelia Valcárcel called with considerable precision “the ablation of memory” which has devastating consequences especially for women, obliging us repeatedly to start from scratch.

In a similar vein, I love to provoke people by quoting these lines by Joan Chittister whom I consider one of the most lucid contemporary Christian women thinkers:

“They shouted as loud as they could, they were put into prison, they were despised by the ‘honourable’ women, denounced by the clergy, forced to eat by the police ... They were not ‘nice’. They were your grandmothers. They were suffragettes. And they were right.”³

I also share the reflection of Celia Amorós that “nothing is better than a good chronology”. In other words, there is a danger that our descendants will believe things have always been like this and will forget the passion and life of struggle of so many women, before us and now, as if the conquest of social, political, cultural, economic and religious rights were something which simply fell from heaven like manna, granted by those who enjoyed them “by divine right” thanks to their benevolence and magnanimity; then they will be left battling with the storm and believing ingenuously that tomorrow will be better and that these things will come their way simply because of the passage of time.

² A major part of this reflection has come out of the seminar on *Contextual reading of the bible and gender perspective* which I have been coordinating over the past few years as part of the research programme of the IDTP; it was compiled for presentation when the Movement Women and Theology invited me to its XIIIth Meeting held on 27 April 2002 in Sevilla. Although I have revised the text and deleted one whole section, and although it still contains a conversational style appropriate for oral presentation, this is how it was published in part in the Pastoral Review *Xirimiri* 12, DDB, Bilbao, 2002, also taking account of the fact that the Review is widely distributed.

³ Joan Chittister, *El Evangelio día a día* (Sal Terrae: Santander 2001), 36.

If history teaches us anything, it is that things can get worse if one does not pay attention, and even if one does. We are beginning to learn and so we know that it is good to make our successes visible in order to interrupt the dynamics of oppression, and that assertive solidarity is essential for us to make more progress, and I am happy to observe that we have now become interesting for ourselves.

When we lead our lives as if so many persons who acted to make things better had never existed, without references, without gratitude, when people insist on telling us that they never existed and do not exist, I feel tremendous sadness because of the dehumanisation which this represents and I militantly stand up for memory. This is certainly an encouraging and painful inheritance of my being a Christian: *do this in memory of me* – make my life, my death and my resurrection a present reality. This is one attempt.

Short introductory chronology about our situation

It is obvious that the changes experienced in the course of the century which has just ended were enormous. No one can ignore that one of the most significant is related to the new awareness of themselves and the dynamism which women have acquired.

The first surge of political feminism arose in the 18th century and constituted the demand for citizenship. Thanks to this first wave, the 19th century had the suffragette movement, the second wave, with its two main demands – the vote and the right to education at every level. In the 20th century these objectives were obtained (?) and the third wave of feminism, the feminism of the seventies, focussed on all the legal reforms and moral changes which surround us. In the course of these three main thrusts for equality, feminism as a movement was accompanied by a theoretical, political discourse which justified its actions. Feminism is a combination of demands and explanations although the former have generally taken precedence over the latter. It is a political philosophy with its own classics and it now carries the weight of nearly three centuries on its shoulders.

In Spain, feminism has its own specifics: we shall not find any leading figures of Spanish feminist thought prior to the decade of the seventies of the 20th century. Any earlier figures were either weak or need to be re-interpreted according to the feminist key because in our country we have undergone that “ablation of historical memory”. This applies to everything that was cut short by the civil war and the period which followed: the memory of what had been and of what could have been possible.

When we try to write Spanish feminist history and read the persons who were writing from the end of the 19th century up to the thirties of the 20th century, or when we discover their biographies, we are in fact recuperating a memory which does not entirely belong to us with the help of a very long bridge.

“A memory of that which we claim as our own but which is not a memory that has become a fact in our own flesh. Our lives were being lived as if all of these persons had never existed. We did not hear about them until we were already adults with our keys established by other kinds of lives. To recuperate this memory, these persons, is very important work. But such recuperation will never be able to obviate our initial orphanhood.”⁴

Spanish christian “feminism”

Or, as in the title of María Salas, *From the promotion of women to feminist theology*.⁵

I put “feminism” in inverted commas because I have an ambiguous feeling about it. Here I am referring to feminism in a very broad sense, ranging from an awareness of the specific dignity of women which is beginning to grow, although it may be very weak and not much thought about, right through to a clear awareness formulated in terms of feminist theory.

In Spain, the fifties, as I have said, were not favourable to the advancement of women. The successes achieved by the initial feminist movements, as a consequence of the struggles fought at the end of the 19th and in the first third of the 20th century, were blocked in Spain after the Civil War, with the exception of the right to vote. The exercise of a number of freedoms was prohibited and a married woman was practically excluded from the world of work.

The mentality and the customs, as María Salas states, corresponded to the spirit of the laws. The majority considered that the natural context for a woman was the home, although there was no negative view of the work done by single women ... or by married women in economic need. In fact, “it was natural” for a woman to get married and devote all her attention to the home and the family. Everything else was the responsibility of the husband who served

⁴ Amelia Valcárcel, *Rebeldes. Hacia la paridad* (Plaza y Janés: Barcelona 2000), 21-23.

⁵ María Salas, *De la promoción de la mujer a la teología feminista* (Sal Terrae: Santander 1993).

as a mediator between the private and the public spheres. Consequently, he exercised the authority and administered their possessions. By law and by custom, the woman was converted into a sort of minor under tutelage. It is hardly necessary to give many of the quite recent examples such as the necessity for the husband's signature in order to buy a car, to quote just one.

Although the climate was not favourable, it did have its cracks and exceptions. In 1960, the courts under Franco approved the so-called Law on the political and professional Rights of the woman and her right to work which removed a major proportion of the discriminations previously in force. This provision had become urgent because of the need for a female labour force to support the development plans of the time.

A number of facts of this kind enabled certain opinions to become established which favoured the feminist thesis. Books were published such as *La secreta guerra de los sexos* (The secret war of the sexes) by María Campo Alange in 1949, *La mujer como mito y como ser humano* (The woman as myth and human being – 1951), *La mujer en España: cien años de su historia* (The woman in Spain: one hundred years of her history – 1964). Lili Álvarez also claimed in her books that women were adults, *En tierra extraña* (In a foreign land – 1954) and *Feminismo y espiritualidad* (Feminism and spirituality – 1964) and María Salas, *Nosotros las solteras* (We single women – 1959), denounced marriage as the only possible way out for women and called on them to lead their own, independent lives.

In certain Catholic circles, people began to feel the need to establish fora in which women could make their own voices heard on these issues. About 1955, the *Amistad Universitaria* was established, an association which served as a point of convergence for three groups which already existed: Graduate Women of Catholic Action, the Marian University Congregations and a group of university women linked with the Institución Teresiana. They read works by Spanish and foreign authors in translation and in the original (Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedman). Their discussions and studies were not published but they formed the basis for lectures and some reviews were enriched by their contributions (*Eidos* devoted two whole numbers to the subject in 1964 and 1968).

The attitudes varied considerably and there was agreement only on two points: a) marriage is not the only way for a woman and b) a woman benefits very much from professional work. The articles and bulletins published by the Woman of Catholic Action demonstrate a joint, committed stand and relate the problem of women to that of all oppressed groups.

Similarly, there was a forum of Christian intellectuals although some agnostics also participated, and it met in a Jesuit house since they were all men, Lilí Alvarez wrote to the leaders expressing her amazement about this and asking for explanations for the exclusion of women. They took a long time to reply and when they did it was to propose a subject for debate: *the relationship between the sexes*; for this they thought it necessary for some woman to be present. She and a dozen other women were invited and María Campo Alange gave one of the introductions to the subject of the day. Apparently, no written documents have been preserved from the sessions which were actively attended by a complete course (1960-61). It has been said that they found a few supporters, many objections which were courteous and slightly condescending and some harsh answers which tended to disqualify them.

Nevertheless, Lilí Alvarez wrote shortly afterwards, "We must state that a baptised woman who is not a feminist cannot be an authentic Christian as far as her position is concerned with reference to her sex and to herself."⁶ After a lot of discussion, they concluded that, just as it is not right for a political party or a trade union to be Christian, nor should there be Christian feminism. The feminism that exists has various emphases, some of which are closer or less close to the Christian message, but none of them is identical with it.

The Second Vatican Council served as a catalyst for all the disquiet about the anomalous situation of women in the church. It gave rise to great enthusiasm which was later considerably frustrated in this connection. The Council did not deal expressly with these issues. However, for the first time, a group of women was invited, late indeed because some sessions had already taken place during which Cardinal Suenens had pointed out that half of humankind was outside of the Council chambers.

At the third session of the Council, Paul VI took up the Cardinal's challenge and included 23 women (10 religious and 13 lay women), a majority chosen from among the leaders of the international Catholic organisations. This situation, which was absolutely unusual at the time, is reflected in the fascinating anecdotes which have been delightfully recorded by Pilar Belosillo, one of the Spanish women among the 13 lay women present.⁷

⁶ María Salas, *De la promoción de la mujer a la teología feminista* (Sal Terrae: Santander 1993), 81.

⁷ María Salas / Teresa Rodríguez de Lecea, *Pilar Belosillo. Nueva imagen de mujer en la Iglesia* (Acción católica: Madrid 2004).

Establishing networks

Everything that came after that is complex. What I wish to underline now is that, under these conditions, a first network of women was formed, as we would say today, and later on, thanks to the relationships that existed, in the spirit of the Council and involving others including some from other Christian traditions (lay women, deaconesses, women theologians), a nucleus for ecumenical dialogue was formed: a joint initiative of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Christian Unity. This took place at Vicarello, near Rome, in 1965.

Pilar Belosillo tells how they discovered Protestant women of very high standing, well schooled in theology and the bible, so that at first they feared they would be dominated by them. There was another meeting the following year in Switzerland. In 1967 at Taizé, the first official International Ecumenical Women's Conference met to discuss the subject: *The Christian Woman: Co-Artisan in a Changing Society*.

After these first two encounters, the Joint Working Group, the official organ linking the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, asked its respective authorities to nominate a group composed of 7 women representing the Catholic Church and 7 from the World Council of Churches. In this way, the Women's Ecumenical Liaison Group (WELG) came into being which organised a further 4 conferences: 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971.

After much work in the meantime and a lot of history, with extremely interesting reflections and results, like the conference in Berlin in 1974 on the theme *Sexism in the seventies: Discrimination against women*, this group served as the predecessor of the *Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women*. We must again underline the tremendous importance of Catholic women being present in Protestant encounters where the women had already reached a high level of biblical and theological reflection and had some standing in their churches. The Ecumenical Forum was established in 1982 at Gwatt (Switzerland). In 1986, again in Switzerland (Magliaso), there was the foundation of a European network of women theologians engaged in academic work, the *European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR)*.

Thanks to the presence of leading Spanish women in these organisations, combined with the disquiet which many had begun to feel, a number of groups came into existence in the eighties in Spain as well. It is interesting to note that our European socialisation has been a fact from the beginning.

In 1986, on the initiative of Pilar Belosillo, the *Foro de Estudios sobre la Mujer* (Forum of studies on women) was founded in Spain. It is a member of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women.

Also in 1986 the first group of *Mujeres y Teología* (Women and Theology) came into being, the first grouping of women students and graduates of theology in Spain. It has now become a broad movement (with autonomous and federated groups) throughout Spain and is known beyond its borders. In my opinion, we lack an account of its history. It would be desirable for neither its development nor its content to disappear, unlike other earlier reflections which we have mentioned, **THUS INCREASING INVISIBILITY** (the mother of all evils).

The same year also saw the establishment of *Dones en L'Esglesia* (Women in the Church) in Cataluña.

The *Asociación de Teólogas Españolas* (ATE – Association of Spanish women theologians) was born in 1992 with the objective of doing its own academic theological work and also stimulating multi-disciplinary, ecumenical and inter-religious reflection.

In the nineties, the initiative was taken of a *European Synod*, a renewal movement which aimed to make room for a wider range of women, taking account of new factors in church membership: there are many women with a Christian conviction who do not feel represented by the churches or by their institutions, even if these are made up of women. They believe the churches devote their energies more to defending their own institutions and programmes than to a commitment to specifically feminist concerns. This is also an outcome of expressly feminist theological reflection, not only that done by women. The ATE established relations with this movement in 1994 and actively shared in organising the First European Synod of Women which was held at Gmunden (Austria) in 1996 under the theme: *Women for change in the 21st century*⁸. *Arnasatu* (Association of Christian women) also came into existence in this connection at Vizcaya in the Basque region. The Second European Synod was held in August 2003 in Barcelona under the title *Sharing cultures – or better: Daring diversity*.⁹

More recently a group *Católicas por el derecho a decidir* (Catholic women for the right to decide) has also been formed in Spain.

A further group of women that would merit separate investigation but will only be mentioned here is the *women religious*. The Spanish religious have not

⁸ Pilar de Miguel (ed.), *Europa con ojos de mujer. Primer Sínodo europeo de mujeres* (Verbo Divino: Estella 1996).

⁹ Pilar de Miguel / María Josefa Amell (eds.), *Atraverse con la diversidad. Segundo Sínodo europeo de mujeres* (Verbo Divino: Estella 2004). When revising this article (December 2004), we added some of the missing points and recent events.

spoken out in public on the situation of women in general and have said very little about their own position within the Church, either as individual congregations, or as collegiate bodies. However, there have been individual statements by a few religious and this is still the case today. A lack of awareness of such significant groups within the Church, the faltering support and the large number of difficulties experienced by many women as a consequence makes them appear to be the female arm supporting the ecclesiastical patriarchy *par excellence*. Nevertheless, because of the complexity of this question, I just mention it and refer you to other reflections along these lines¹⁰, hoping for a specific study in the future.

Considering this brief but important review, it seems obvious that the *United Nations Conference of 1985*, which concluded the *Women's Decade* in Nairobi, called upon the churches to "overcome the discriminatory teachings and practices affecting women as a Christian response to the strategies for the future" approved by the conference. And that, taking up the challenge, the *World Council of Churches* launched its *Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998)*. The women of the churches, or at least those that still remained within them, received it with interest and increased their organisational capacity, to judge by the dates on which new organisations and activities were launched. In this way, further Catholic voices were heard, for example at the *United Nations Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994* and also at that in *Beijing 1995*.

It should not be forgotten that it was in 1992 that the General Synod of the Church of England took the decision to ordain women.

Some consequences

As women continued to gain ground as actors in the religious field and protagonists of their own spirituality and thinking, gradually a number of fundamental questions arose. Such as those related to the negotiations which Catholic women need to undertake, for example concerning their membership of the Church.¹¹

¹⁰ Elisabeth Carroll, "La mujer en la vida religiosa", in: *Concilium* 111 (1976), 117-128; Joan Chittister, *El fuego en estas cenizas* (Sal Terrae: Santander 1998); Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Hermanas en armas. Dos milenios de historia de la monjas católicas* (Herder: Freiburg / Basel / Wien 1999); Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Rehacer la vida religiosa* (Claretianas: Madrid 2001); Barbara Fiand, *Luchando con Dios* (Claretianas: Madrid 2002).

¹¹ Based on an unpublished study by Rosemary Kamke, "Stages of the Catholic woman", concerning their membership in the Catholic Church.

The moments and phases which I am going to describe can also take place simultaneously and may be found in the same woman repeatedly throughout her life.

There is an initial moment when the woman accepts the teachings of the Church and its practices because she identifies the Church with God. The predominant sentiment is that of security. She receives clear ideas from the Church.

Later, some degree of unease begins to appear with an initial experience of injustice because she is a woman. She dares to think, although she works in the Church “up to the hilt”, that she is being treated as inferior.

There then comes a third stage when she recognizes that the Church is imbued with a patriarchal structure which transcends the borders of all economic, social, educational and religious systems in her own culture and has the same negative effects on the women of all the cultures of the world. Her emotional response is a mixture of “shock” and relief. She sympathises with other women who are suffering from discrimination in one way or another and she feels the necessity to express solidarity with them.

Then rejection follows. She feels still more strongly that she is isolated in the patriarchal structures. If she goes away, she experiences solitude resulting from her lack of participation and fear of what might happen without her Church. She is invaded by feelings of anger.

If women do not allow this fourth stage to paralyse them, there is a further step when they face the responsibility of seeking God in their own way and for the choices they have made in their lives. They perceive a God who is tender and vulnerable, passionate and strong, who even “seems more like themselves”. When this new perception of God is consolidated, it increases their confidence in and respect for themselves. At the same time, they feel more sensitive to other forms of injustice. They have a growing interest in acting in favour of justice. Then the predominant sentiment is of confidence; confidence in themselves, in God and in the capability of human beings to work together to change things.

We may then see these women, at a later stage, forming a community with other women, with the clear conviction that they are Church and making a continuous effort to influence the hierarchical structures. Many women who reach this point take the decision not to accept employment within the institutional church and extend their ministry naturally to realms beyond the structures of the Church and far from its control. It would be very interesting, in this connection, to engage in a reflection on the feminisation of the NGOs and the background of their members.

There is a further stage in the experience of some when the woman discovers within herself a renewed vitality, her own innate energy as a woman, which enables her to mediate and give birth to the new Church. She feels strong and compassionate. The predominant sentiment is of an inner, invincible peace. She works in the Church and with the Church in the awareness that it is in the man-woman relationship that the Church and its structures can be transformed. (This stage must not be confused with the first. It is not the same thing to have come back as never to have gone away).¹²

What does all this amount to and what effect does it have on the churches? What capacity does it have to act in the name of Catholics as a group? The question of ordination continues unresolved, not so much with regard to the matter of gender (which now seem obvious) but with regard to linking ordination with decision making. The sacramental function of presiding over the eucharist is one thing, but taking decisions on all matters from the use of funds to programmes of theology and professorial appointments, and everything in between, is something else. It implies other matters that are extremely interesting and with regard to which I personally agree with Mary Hunt¹³ that they are of greater interest.

What does it mean when we say that we women are church or when we speak or feel that we belong to the *ekklesia of women*¹⁴?

We must proceed to clarify these questions. To what must we give priority in our lives and our commitments? To what must we die so that other things can live? What must be buried for ever? Which shoots of life deserve to be tended?¹⁵

In general, women have great difficulties about abandoning things, commitments and relationships; they get enmeshed (not in the sense of forming networks but of getting bogged down) in thousands of things. It is fundamental and absolutely essential at the present time for women to stop and carefully analyse reality and their own reality, including the shades of guilt – the tendency to say that they never do enough, that they are never good or courageous

¹² I spell out this idea further in “Propuesta”, Mercedes Navarro and Pilar de Miguel (eds.), *10 palabras clave en teología feminista* (Verbo divino: Estella 2004).

¹³ Mary Hunt, “Las mujeres somos Iglesia”, in: *Concilium* 281 (1999), 133-147.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *En memoria de ella* (DDB: Bilbao 1989).

¹⁵ Izaskun Sáez de la Fuente, “A la búsqueda de una identidad no impuesta”, in: Isabel Gómez Acebo (ed.), *Qué esperamos de la Iglesia? La respuesta de 30 mujeres* (colección en clave de mujer; DDB: Bilbao 2001).

enough, the compulsive necessity to serve, always to help and to save everyone and the whole world, etc. What more could the system want than to keep us busy doing things so that we cannot stop and think!

It is essential to have a good analysis and for discernment to follow, together with the related strategies and clear objectives, in the short, medium and long term, and to find the resources to put them into practice. Joan Chittister has said:

“We need to know what we think before being able to decide what we should do. If we engage in ‘good works’, without at the same time cultivating our intellectual gifts which can enable us to examine the causes of the problems, we shall be wasting the best resources which a group has for constructing a future.”¹⁶

I believe that there is still an inner conviction (although it is expressed in different words) that we came into this life to suffer, that it is “a vale of tears”, and it even seems that women have patented it. An excessive “gender *memoria passionis*”. All too frequently, women have been and are invited to unite themselves with the suffering of Christ and to remain passive and powerless because these qualities of “resignation” and “humility” are marvellous for humanising relationships, thus taking care of the healthy upbringing of their children and being the repose for their husbands when they come home from an agitated public life. This is called the “special nature” of women or something similar and is always very sublime. But it causes them directly to tolerate unbearable suffering and abuse which must be rejected absolutely. They then become victims, not only of those with names and surnames who maltreat them, but also of the blindness of a whole society which, in the name of the family, holiness or the home, will do nothing or not enough to liberate them from this situation and does not believe anything needs to be done.

The patriarchalism and sexism of the Church have contributed to this situation in at least the following three ways:¹⁷

- institutionally dehumanising women by disqualifying them because of their sex from having access to the sacred and to leadership,
- justifying or attempting to justify this patriarchal oppression theologically, so that it is perpetuated – even in the name of God, and

¹⁶ Joan Chittister, *El fuego en estas cenizas* (Sal Terrae: Santander 1998).

¹⁷ I include some reflections by Carolyn Osiek, *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church* (Paulist Press: New York 1986).

- promoting a false awareness which allows both oppressors and the oppressed to accept and inwardly cherish their roles blindly.

If there is too much gender suffering, there must also be and there is gender resurrection. The woman's body has a mind and a brain, not only a womb, breasts, feelings, sentiments and emotions. This means she has the capability of defining the world and defining herself. And this is exactly what she will go on doing in a long process of growing awareness, including rejecting the idea that reality must be like this, via curiosity about and entering into a new way of seeing life and of understanding, to moments of anger, rage, breaking with all that is old, moments of *impasse* and not knowing which way to go, and finally beginning to open up new paths and risk following trails which have not been marked out before. As Adrienne Rich has said, "We have to get accustomed to the fact that we need to invent what we desire".

That is the major change of this century, "the idea which women have of themselves", as the French writer and ex-minister, Françoise Giroud stated. The sociologist, Anthony Giddens (now dean of the London School of Economics and holder of the Prince of Asturias prize for 2002), defined it as follows:

"We are faced with a fundamental movement, widely organised by exceptional women who, taking advantage of every available crack, have convinced other women, a vast, anonymous and courageous majority, and some men. It is a lasting change because it aims to convince, not to impose. The women do not impose, they propose. When they have acquired sufficient knowledge and experience, and only then, they know that they are ready to convince, and that is the situation at present."¹⁸

Feminist theology¹⁹

It was necessary to discuss all of this because this and these are the contexts in which the majority of Spanish or Spaniard women theologians, to whom we

¹⁸ Margarita Rivière, *El mundo según las mujeres* (Aguilar: Madrid 2000), 11-12. 135-139.

¹⁹ Very often there is confusion between feminist theology and *a theology of women*. It is wrongly interpreted to mean "feminine" theology, a theology which perpetuates the cultural and religious stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. On the other hand, it is important to note that the diversity of approaches in the intellectual expressions of feminists can also be found in feminist theology and studies of religion. So it is not possible to speak of feminist theology without taking this diversity into account. Its various expressions are not only related to the different suppositions and theoretical analyses of the experiences of women; they also reflect different theological systems: neo-orthodoxy, liberal theology, process theology, evangelical theology, liberation theology or the critical and feminist theology of liberation. In this sense,

are referring, have done and are doing their theology. Indeed, when the majority of women theologians speak about themselves and their theology, in practice they all refer to some of these processes and groups as the ones with which they identify themselves most or to which they relate.

Spaniard theology is primarily a theology of effort, coming out of a struggle, a product of suffering. It has come into being in the main without any support from the theological institutions; on the contrary, the latter have erected and continue to erect barriers and new or permanent obstacles.

Our university does not have the option of theology as a secular career, a matter which has made the access to studying it much easier in other countries, as one would wish. Our theological faculties are ecclesiastical and have generally been conceived to teach future priests and religious, obviously all men.

Some of our German or Austrian friends have been faced later on with the difficulty of finding paid employment, although study centres and the Protestant church offices accommodate quite a large proportion of the demand. In Spain, the selection begins before one starts to study. In this sense, our theology is quite adult and multi-disciplinary by necessity. In other words, our women theologians have previously done other university studies so they come to theological reflection with more cultural baggage and experience of life and the church (but, of course, this does not favour these students as one might have thought); they hence have a broader hermeneutical horizon, in many cases including new contents and revising methodologies. And, above all, it is a vocation. Otherwise, one could not understand the personal price they pay to get admitted and, above all, to continue in theology.

The development of Spanish feminist theology is linked, as throughout Europe, with the reception of the feminist theology from North America. However, as we have seen, it falls on fertile soil. Authors such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and many others are also part of our tradition. Initially, either in English or translated into other languages and then, as we joined the struggle, also in Spanish translation. That is an enterprise into which some of us have put much effort in order to ensure better reception in view of the difficulties the majority of people in this country have with other languages. In this connection, it has been very

the theological expressions are rooted in different views of the church and different politico-religious contexts. (Cf. Elisabeth Schlüssler Fiorenza, "Una teología crítica y feminista de la liberación", in: *Concilium* 191 (1984), 63-76.

helpful that the periodical *Concilium* has devoted some issues to feminist theology. Similarly, other names from the German tradition have been important such as Dorothee Sölle or Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Ida Raming or the Dutch theologian Catharina Halkes. As time passed, they have begun to form part of our tradition, together with authors like the Brazilian women Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, the Mexican María Pilar Aquino or the Uruguayan María Teresa Porcile, with whom we have shared both the theological enterprise and other projects.

When one looks at the Spanish theological panorama²⁰, one finds names such as María José Arana, Carmen Bernabé, Felisa Elizondo, Mercedes Navarro, Isabel Gómez Acebo, Dolores Aleixandre, Esperanza Bautista, Trinidad León, Pilar de Miguel, Elisa Estévez, Emma Martínez, María Tabuyo, etc. I also recall others from the younger generation like Lucía Ramón, Rosa Cursach, etc.

I wish to mention some of the publications by Spanish women writers which are helping us all to make progress, reformulating, reflecting and correcting. I shall begin with some collective works as an example, but also out of gratitude to the editors of these volumes for the work done.

**10 mujeres escriben teología* (10 women write theology), edited by Mercedes Navarro and published by Verbo Divino in 1993, is, in a sense, the first, comprehensive presentation of feminist theology or of theology done by women in Spain. The editor states in her introduction,

- “Our book contains much from feminist theology in a more or less explicit form.
- a) The articles by the different authors have the following characteristics: a critical attitude to the subjects and disciplines of the past as far as women are concerned;
 - b) a stand adopted by women and in their favour in the present which tries to do justice to a historical forgetfulness that is part of the sin of the patriarchal Church;
 - c) a resolute, courageous and creative openness towards the future in which we women feel we are actors, responsible for the way the Church is going and the reflection on faith which constitutes theology, and
 - d) the use of inter-disciplinarity and ecumenical openness when doing this theology.”²¹

The terms chosen: Bible, Christ, God, Hope, Church, Woman, Prayer, Sin, Priesthood, Sacraments, are terms behind which lie key issues for Christian theology (biblical theology and exegesis, Christology, fundamental theology,

²⁰ Juan Bosch, *Panorama de la teología española* (Verbo Divino: Estella 2000).

²¹ Mercedes Navarro (ed.), *10 mujeres escriben teología* (Verbo Divino: Estella 1993), 7-9.

eschatology, ecclesiology, sacraments, theological anthropology, spirituality, morality).

**Para comprender el Cuerpo de la mujer. Una perspectiva bíblica y ética* (Understanding the woman's body. A biblical and ethical perspective), edited by Mercedes Navarro and published by Verbo Divino in 1996. When the Association of Spanish Women Theologians (ATE) held its first conference in 1993, the subject it examined was the woman and theological ethics. The necessity had arisen to study the relation between the woman's body and ethics. This publication was the result of two years of seminars and research on this issue. It contains subjects such as body and community, body, sex and woman from an anthropological perspective, myths and symbols of female submission, corporeality, earth, woman and ecology, women's bodies and the bible, and a wealth of bibliography on the subject.²²

**Europa con ojos de mujer. Primer Sínodo Europeo de Mujeres* (Europe through women's eyes. First European Synod of Women), edited by Pilar de Miguel and published by Verbo Divino in 1996, is an attempt to relate groups of Spanish women to the realities of the movements and theological discussions in Europe in the nineties and to the changes of perspective which were emerging compared with the past.

**Cambio de paradigma, género y eclesiología* (Paradigm change, gender and ecclesiology), edited by Carmen Bernabé and published by Verbo Divino in 1998. This book reflects the 2nd Theological Conference organised by the Association of Spanish Women Theologians. The book comprises two sections: change of paradigm and gender considered from the point of view of critical feminist theory, psychoanalysis, history and theology, and a second part which is specifically ecclesiological: gender and ecclesiology.

**Colección: En clave de mujer* (Collection: With a woman's key), edited by Isabel Gómez Acebo on behalf of the Association of Spanish Women Theologians (ATE) and published by Desclée de Brouwer from 1999 onwards. To date, this collection comprises 17 published titles and a number of others about to go to press covering spirituality, history, biblical and theological subjects which the women themselves have produced, and also some translations.

²² There is an interesting reflection about this by Marciano Vidal, "The impact of feminist theology on my conception of theological ethics", in: *Concilium* 263 (1996), 132-134; "Ética feminista", in: *Razón y Fe* 228 (1993), 147-166 and 229 (1994), 178-192; *Feminismo y ética: cómo "feminizar" la moral* (PPC: Madrid 2000).

The express aim is to promote interest in the broad issue faced by Christian and theological thought and the life of women. In this way, women from different contexts have been able to take the floor.

**Y vosotros, quién decís que soy* (As for you, whom do you say that I am) and *Así vemos Dios* (This is how we see God) are two titles which take up the content of the issues tackled over the past two years in the Conferences of the ATE: Christology (2000) and the question of God (2001).

In addition to these collections, it is worth emphasising some other works which contribute interesting individual and original thought to scientific reflection: *María Magdalena. Tradiciones en el cristianismo primitivo* (Mary Magdalene. Traditions in early Christianity) by Carmen Bernabé, published in 1994 by Verbo Divino; *La clausura de las mujeres. Una lectura teológica de un proceso histórico* (Women in enclosure. A theological reading of a historical process) by María José Arana, published by Mensajero in 1992; *Barro y aliento. Exégesis y antropología teológica de Génesis 2-3* (Clay and breath. Exegesis and theological anthropology of Genesis 2-3) published by Paulinas in 1993 and *Ungida para la vida. Exégesis narrativa de Mc 14,3-9 y Jn 12,1-8* (Anointed for life. Narrative exegesis of Mark 14,3-9 and John 12,1-8) by Mercedes Navarro, published by Verbo Divino in 1999.²³

Moreover, many things are changing; some of these women have managed to be appointed lecturers in faculties or theological institutes and others have published many interesting works of their own. But, even though feminist theology has become something to be reckoned with in the theological and ecclesial debate, it still continues to be “a rebellion on the frontier”, as Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes has called it.²⁴

In Spain and France, we have a further problem which is the question of feminism. Women theologians here are somewhat fearful of describing themselves as feminists. One would need to examine the internalised reasons behind this. I think it would be very interesting to analyse the historical relations or non-relations which have existed between feminism and Christianity in this country. We could then find answers to more than one question.

²³ We also have the more recent, interesting thesis by Elisa Estévez, *El poder de una mujer creyente. Cuerpo, identidad y discipulado en Mc 5,24b-34. Un estudio desde las ciencias sociales* (Verbo divino: Estella 2003).

²⁴ I owe this reflection to Monika Jakobs, “La teología feminista en Europa”, in: *Concilium* 263 (1996), 53-65. Cf. Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, *Rebellion auf der Grenze. Ortsbestimmung feministischer Theologie* (Herder: Freiburg i. Brsg. 1990).

I would not wish to refrain from quoting some words from a woman who is much loved in Europe and is a pioneer. Catharina Halkes defined feminism more than 20 years ago in the following way: “It goes beyond emancipation and equality which are necessary prerequisites for a broader process that is simultaneously psychological, socio-economic and cultural.”²⁵

Nevertheless, at present some women theologians in Spain are beginning to face up to the critical theories of Spanish feminism, such as Celia Amorós, Amelia Valcárcel, María Jesús Izquierdo, Teresa del Valle and others. I believe this is a fruitful approach. The same applies to the rise of Christian women thinkers in other related disciplines, sociology of religion, psychology, history, etc. This is beginning to be possible, but not without difficulty, because we have continued to meet in life, in academia and in militant practice. I believe that this could give rise to a feminist theological thinking that is original and authentically ours, responding to our particularities. We naturally share in the common, universal concerns, but we also need to reflect what is original and different in our own situation.

**10 palabras clave en teología feminista* (Ten key words in feminist theology), edited by Mercedes Navarro and Pilar de Miguel and published by Verbo Divino in 2004, is a product of the kind of study mentioned above. This most recent collection attempts to bring the first – *10 mujeres escriben teología* (Ten women write theology) – up to date to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the ATE (Association of Spanish Women Theologians).

In the course of the 10 years which have passed, some things have changed, such as the number and quality of the women theologians who are now more numerous and more diverse. The context in the country has changed: with growing secularisation and religious indifference, there are more diverse contexts from which we reflect on and experience the influence and impact on reality. Our communication has also changed and now become more international. What has not changed, however, is the androcentric and patriarchal context of the Catholic Church and of a major part of the state, nor have many other forms of conditioning changed which the writers describe in their contributions.

We have moved on from *10 women* to *10 words*, attempting to focus the book on the reflection produced, aware that each of us authors is indebted to

²⁵ Quoted by Rosino Gibellini, “Feminismo y teología”, in: *Iglesia Viva* 121 (1986), 49-75, here 54.

many others. The order of the articles tries to convey the consensus about critical feminist methodology: experience, history and the present which is unfinished. The catalogue of terms demonstrates what has been said and underlines what has not been said, either because we assume it or because it has not yet been formulated. *Experience, process, commitment, celebration, tradition, Word, identity, Mystery, proposal and method.*

Despite examples such as these, I believe that most of the work still remains to be done. It would be very interesting and worthy of a university chair. The dialogue can and must take place in the various gender halls of the universities. It would be a tremendous service to the country and to the various autonomous communities. I have spent so much time calling for this chair that I believe my epitaph will read: *here lies a woman who died in the attempt of demanding a chair of feminism and Christianity.* Such a thing exists in other places, for example in Nijmegen.

In France, the association “Femmes et Hommes en Eglise” (Women and Men in Church) is an official voice of feminist theology; as its name indicates, it is also open for men. Although some people claim that could serve as a model for us here, I have serious doubts about whether it might not swallow up the thinking and struggle of the women, as has been and is the case with some efforts along these lines.

I agree more with the analysis made by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza on this issue which Mercedes Navarro has also voiced.²⁶ She claims that women today have three options for approaching the theological profession, to give it a name:²⁷

1. To accept the cosmic visions in academia of masculine “clericality” which have silenced us as women. Hence, they make an effort better to master the discourse used by these men in order to be accepted by their “theological masters or fathers” who are their guides in these matters. They often are offended when students or other women lecturers question the patriarchal academic system in feminist terms. They become “good daughters” of their “theological fathers” and join in the academic discourse of the “fathers”. They must not be too aggressive or assertive and must work hard in the shadows.

²⁶ Mercedes Navarro, “La exégesis feminista del NT: con acento extranjero”, in: *Sal Terrae* (September 2000), 643-654.

²⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Pero ella dijo. Prácticas feministas de interpretación bíblica* (Trotta: Madrid 1996).

By virtue of this attitude, they risk losing their identity, not finding their own “accent” and silencing their theological voices and religious creativity. This approach is also an obstacle to changing the kyrio-centric awareness²⁸ and the androcentric optic produced by academic and ecclesiastical discourse.

2. To reject or despise intellectual work, research and the biblical religions because they represent the discourse of a white, male elite which undermines the self-assertiveness and self-determination of women. But to accuse careful research, abstract theory or intellectual exploration of being masculine implies reaffirming the cultural stereotypes of men as rational thinkers and women as emotional and intuitive story tellers, apart from other questions of one’s own “shadow”²⁹ which Schüssler Fiorenza has analysed with her characteristic precision.

This option, which constitutes a total rejection of academic institutions or which refuses to play “the professional game”, deprives us feminists not only of the possibility of speaking in a different way within the university and the Church, but also of the opportunity to acquire the intellectual tools, practical skills and institutional standing which could allow us to produce a “new” understanding of the world, to make our theological voices heard and to change the theological and religious institutions themselves for the benefit of women.

3. The third option is to make the effort of intellectual bilingualism speaking with “a foreign accent”. In order to make the practice of resistance and “disloyalty” to the patriarchal authority possible, feminist theory and theology must always engage in reflection of a second order in the feminist struggles for liberation, as well as continuing to be responsible for them.

Nevertheless, we must remain fully aware that this patriarchal coexistence is a pragmatic strategy for survival. Without such practices of resistance and strategic cooperation, gender, feminist or women’s studies in the religious field will simply reproduce the current view of women in the patriarchal discursive framework of the academic world and the church.

This third option obliges us to explore the contradictory personal situation of the feminist research theologian. The situation is complex, ambiguous and difficult, but, in addition to opportunities for cooperation, it also provides innumerable threads of inspiration, creativity and energy for the theological enterprise.

²⁸ The term “kyriarchal” refers to an understanding of the patriarchy which is not limited to the sex-gender system but includes the inter-related structures of domination and masculine aristocracy. Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Pero ella dijo*, 154 ss.

²⁹ Here we refer to the Jungian characterisations of “shadow”.

Speaking of the tremendous contradictions which we sometimes experience, I always recall humorously – and that is very helpful – how Ivonne Gebara was asked (we do not know if this really happened or whether it is an urban legend, but it serves as an example) whether it was not a contradiction for her to remain a member of her congregation following the harsh treatment she experienced when Rome ordered her “to keep silent”. She replied that “we all have an uncle who is a captain or general and whom we adore although we are anti-militarists ...” In a world where relations are so a-symmetrical, to pretend we have no contradictions means we are crazy or dead.

Although we critical feminist liberation theologians speak from within the discourse of academic disciplines and the Church, we do so on a socio-political basis similar to “resident foreigners”, as members and the excluded at the same time: members by virtue of our residence or patriarchal affiliation to a masculine institution; excluded in terms of language, experience, culture and history. This metaphor of the resident foreigner is suggested by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza for a feminist movement and policy of liberation in the context of academia and the Church.

So a growing number of women, both students and lecturers, are insisting on formulating their own questions in line with the hermeneutics of suspicion, voicing their own historical and systematic reconstructions and claiming their own authority in experience, theology and the church.

Although feminist theology in general and the Spanish version in particular are suffering and under pressure, they also have a Pascal vocation; I therefore believe it is essential to receive personal support. This is provided by the networks of women, by appreciation and recognition, by offers of work and opportunities to participate in projects of study and publication.

It is also necessary to start speaking seriously about economic support and effective solidarity from groups, communities and institutions. It is extremely expensive and requires much effort to continue in the theological enterprise and to publish under the present conditions. I believe that many institutions, which ask for lectures and short courses “with some joy” because they want “a woman” to do this (sometimes the remarks are frivolous), are not aware that they are benefiting from this bloodshed and are not contributing what they could or should to encouragement and maintenance; I am referring to congregations, foundations and organisations which, on the other hand, are accustomed to providing economic support for various projects. Perhaps the time has come for discernment about issues which deserve to be subsidised.

In other countries of Europe, there are also examples of wealthy women who establish foundations so that this type of research project can develop autonomously to promote a change of paradigm and help to create a world in which resources are distributed better.

Feminist theology is not just a movement in favour of equal rights in the churches; it also changes the perspective of theology and its content. The women's movements in the churches have realised that the full participation of women in drawing up theological theories will have far reaching consequences for how theology understands itself as a science and for its content.

I agree with the statement by Monika Jakobs³⁰ that feminist theology is not defined by the so-called "women's issues" or by the research workers who (coincidentally?) by majority are women, but rather proposes a new understanding of theology. This hermeneutics contributes the idea, corresponding to political theology and liberation theology, that theology always takes sides, whether or not it claims to do so. Therefore it is necessary to formulate this partisan approach and give it a solid basis. Its content includes "conscious one-sidedness" in the face of pseudo-objectivity, and it expresses the obligation of science to engage in liberating practice (in this case, the practice of the feminist movement). These issues are being discussed and are controversial at present.

To quote a theologian from the United States, David Tracy, "the combination of historical studies of gender and liberationist commitments has changed the historical nature of theology as a whole ... It may be necessary for several generations to continue the work in order to complete this revision of the Christian tradition which has already begun, because studies related to gender are those which lead the way in an analysis of new forms of hermeneutics following the lines both of recuperation and of suspicion."³¹

He also states that feminist thinking has formulated the strongest criticism of, and proposed the most convincing revisions related to, three fatal dissociations found in modern notions of rationality, including the models used in numerous contemporary forms of fundamental theology. Namely: "thinking" has been dissociated from feeling and experience; "content" has been separated from "form"; and modern "theory" has been cut off from practice.³²

³⁰ I refer to her reflection "la teología feminista en Europa", in: *Concilium* 263 (1996), 53-65.

³¹ David Tracy, "El desafío de la teología feminista a la teología fundamental", in: *Concilium* 263 (1996), 129-131.

³² Tracy, "El desafío de la teología feminista a la teología fundamental", 129-131.

Final remarks

Autonomous and institutional discourse have mutual need of one another. The constant challenge to feminist theology to justify itself has also been a help to prevent it succumbing to complacency. Nevertheless, space for autonomy is necessary for the birth of creative concepts which are not yet complete and need a sheltered sphere.

As long as sexism exists in the churches and the sciences, the conscious life of a woman in the Church or as a theologian, whether she calls herself a feminist or rejects the term, implies living "on the frontier".³³ And it is only by means of solidarity that we shall be able to face these challenges.

Nearly one hundred years ago, Matilda Joslyn Gage defined this task for feminist theology:

"The most important struggle in the course of the history of the church is the one which liberates women to freedom and reflection and gives them the right to communicate this thinking to the world."³⁴

The movement of women and feminist theology are a sign of hope for all Christian women and all men who are hoping and working for a world free of violence. Their existence is evidence of the activity of the Spirit of God transforming reality and consciousness from within a world of sin. Theological and ecclesial support for this movement is a human and Christian imperative if the churches wish to share in solving the major problems affecting humankind. In this connection, I join María Pilar Aquino³⁵ who invited the international theological community and the hierarchy of the patriarchal churches to establish suitable channels for conversation and dialogue with this movement.

Translation from the Spanish: Margaret A. Pater

³³ This affirmation may be more significant after listening to the address by Mercedes Navarro on frontier and other relevant metaphors related to feminist theologies given to the 2nd European Synod of Women held at Barcelona in August 2003, cf. de Miguel / Amell (eds.), *Atraverse con la diversidad*, 95-139.

³⁴ Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman, Church and State*. Quoted in Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Romper el silencio", in: *Concilium* 202 (1985), 320, note 25.

³⁵ María Pilar Aquino, "El movimiento de mujeres: fuente de esperanza", in: *Concilium* 283 (1999), 123-129.

Niemand kann darüber hinwegsehen, dass eine der bedeutendsten Veränderungen des letzten Jahrhunderts mit dem neuen Bewusstsein und der Dynamik verbunden ist, die Frauen erlangt haben. In Spanien hat der Feminismus seine Besonderheiten: Vor den siebziger Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts lässt sich keine führende spanische feministische Denkerin finden; denn wir haben jenes "Schwinden des historischen Gedächtnisses" durchgemacht. Dies gilt für alles, was durch den Bürgerkrieg und den darauf folgenden Zeitraum unter- oder abgebrochen worden war: die Erinnerung an das, was war und was hätte sein können. Spanische Theologie ist in erster Linie eine Theologie der Anstrengung, entstanden aus einem Kampf, ein Produkt des Leidens. Sie entstand im Wesentlichen ohne Unterstützung seitens der theologischen Institutionen. Gegenwärtig verändert sich vieles. Die Entwicklung einer spanischen feministischen Theologie ist wie überall in Europa eng mit der feministischen Theologie aus Nordamerika verbunden. Sie fällt hier auf fruchtbaren Boden.

Nul ne peut ignorer qu'un des principaux changements du siècle dernier est lié à la conscience des femmes ainsi qu'à la nouvelle dynamique qu'elles acquièrent. En Espagne, le féminisme a cette particularité de n'avoir pas fourni de grandes penseuses féministes avant les années 1970, car nous avons subi une perte de «mémoire historique» qui s'étend, du reste, à tout ce qui a été interrompu ou brisé par la guerre civile et l'après-guerre: le souvenir de ce qui fut et aurait pu être. La théologie espagnole est avant tout une théologie de l'effort, née d'une lutte contre la souffrance, et un produit de celle-ci. Elle vit le jour sans soutien substantiel de la part des institutions théologiques. Actuellement, beaucoup de choses changent. L'évolution d'une théologie espagnole féministe est, comme partout en Europe, étroitement liée à la théologie féministe venue des États-Unis, et elle arrive sur un terrain fertile.

Pilar de Miguel (*1957) is Professor of Biblical Theology and Coordinator of an Interdisciplinary Feminist Seminar at the Theological Institute of the Diocese of Bilbao. She studied social education and biblical theology in Bilbao – Madrid, and feminism and spirituality in Detroit – Toronto. She has been the Publishing Director of the Catholic Biblical Federation (Stuttgart) and is a member of a number of associations for women and theology in Spain, Europe and America. She is the author of several publications, among them: Mercedes Navarro / Pilar de Miguel (eds), *10 palabras clave en teología feminista* (Verbo Divino: Estella 2004); *Espiritualidad y fortaleza femenina* (colección en clave de mujer; DDB: Bilbao 2005).