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Thinking *foemineo modo*: Feminist Theology in Italy

Introduction

Originating in America and Anglo-Saxon countries, feminist reflection has also developed in the countries of Southern Europe, flourishing in Italy in various disciplinary contexts. In the 1970s Italy shared the social and political enthusiasms that linked up the youth of that generation: those years consequently saw the emergence of groups committed to the liberation and affirmation of women in the public and private sphere, confronting a long-standing conservative tradition. The first women's groups shared knowledge – political, psychoanalytic and empirical – and took part in actions, testifying to the need for a change in roles and behaviour. This thinking and action led to undeniable successes albeit accompanied by misguided and extreme positions, which may now be interpreted as signs of a maturing cultural process. Once that political season was over, the women coming after were able to enjoy the victories of their predecessors, taking advantage of a moderate climate in which they no longer needed to go on the barricades.

Once their political and social rights had been recognised (in Italy women were given the right to vote in 1945-46), the need to work for gender equality seemed, from some points of view, to be outdated, reaffirmed only by public institutions (which e.g. set up committees to guarantee “equal opportunities”, also including the possibility of reaching the top – the “glass ceiling” indicating the level of powers that remained clearly a male prerogative). The “right to the feminine”, by contrast, was a long story of social, political and moral diminishment. For example, the number of “missing women” (those not born due to the preference for boys) in the South is dramatic, and recording it a sociological challenge, while in Italy there are sadly no statistics on the number of women who have suffered violence, including in their own family, and whose value is greatly under-estimated in the world of work.

The equality so fervently desired has, in many ways, remained a right established in law but basically existing only on paper. It has proved hard to implement in social reality, in everyday family life and in the broader cultural

context. Nevertheless, it is still true that Italian society made great strides after World War II regarding the emancipation and affirmation of women. For that reason, the new generations have turned their attention to cultural commitment in the broad sense. No longer struggling for equality, they have become interested in defining difference.

It is one thing to continue to work for the general respect for human dignity and against all possible sexism. It is quite another to sharpen awareness of the duality of human gender. The two tasks, separated through the time of their emergence, are equal in importance. But while in the 1960s or 70s women aspired to be as authoritative and able as men – so that “sisters and brothers” became the form of address even in monasteries – from around the 1980s feminist research moved in the direction of “difference”, highlighting that which properly indicated the specificity of women, and also the constitutive difference between the genders.

The thinking of difference

The topic “sex and gender” from Anglo-Saxon linguistics and sociology has also become an issue in the Italian debate, originally introduced by the French thinker Luce Irigaray.¹ She fostered the idea of “difference” on the basis of a critical reception of the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir. The existentialist philosopher had published *The Second Sex* in 1949, demonstrating with academic thoroughness and sound arguments that women were subordinate to men. This subordination was supported by examples drawn from biology, anthropology and psychoanalysis – all examples of honest scholarship but inevitably misguided in that they were primarily mono-sexist in orientation. Philosophy itself was monosexist, having always been an exercise in thinking in identical terms for both genders. If a male thinker uncritically assumed the masculine gender to be universal in structuring his work, with its linguistic instruments and conceptual categories, it necessarily followed that his work was constructed by a protagonist imposing himself as a model of identity, while his external object of study, if different from himself, signified otherness, or difference.

Simone de Beauvoir denounced this asymmetrical structure, showing how impossible and incongruent it was by reference to a prominent thinker about

¹ Cf. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Genres à travers les langues* (Grasset: Paris 1990); Ead., *Je, Tu, Nous* (Grasset: Paris 1990); Ead., *J'aime à toi* (Grasset: Paris 1992); Ead., *Être Deux* (Grasset: Paris 1997); Ead., *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Éd. De Minuit: Paris 1985).

difference, Emmanuel Levinas. While radically committed to recognising the value of the 'other', which is never reducible to the identity of the thinking protagonist who strives to assimilate the other to his own sameness, Levinas pointed to the paradigmatic otherness of women. Women *are* the 'other', in absolute terms, in their mystery even resembling the divine. Simone de Beauvoir quashed this – albeit fascinating – definition, showing that this reasoning only works from a male standpoint. A woman should be thought and spoken of as being different. But what if the thinker is a woman – what will happen to such a model? Can she conceive of herself on the basis of an identity that is equal to that of a man, while the paradigm of difference is the female? In order to do that, a woman thinker would have to negate herself and pretend to be a man.

With *Speculum: Of the Other Woman* (1974 – Engl. tr. 1985) Luce Irigaray elaborated the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir², the woman who could have been her teacher (although she was not), and denounced the equating of the universal with the masculine within language and thus within thought.

Culture, developed as patriarchal from time immemorial, has forged a manner of speaking which, regardless of the specificity of different languages, uses the masculine gender when intending to designate something universal, common or plural, while it relegates the feminine to contexts solely concerning women, if such contexts exist at all. The feminine cannot be used in a general sense. Linguistics and psychoanalysis, along with philosophy, have taught us that the way we speak informs thought, through the intermediary of signs, symbols and paradigms. A male-centred use of language has planted certain images in the human psyche. For example, the ecstasies of women “mystics”, or, more visibly, the excesses of those women said to be “possessed of the devil”, assume the ritual of performance as the only ritual immediately enabling them to define themselves.

The web of language and thought in philosophy has involved dualistic, hierarchical models, logically constructed from given premises. From one angle there is the man, whose thinking starts with himself and who recognises the woman as his 'other'. He, the thinker and leader, is the lord (*kyrios*) to which the others are subject: weaker men, women, servants, children, animals, other living beings and the Earth. So, on one hand, we will have the masculine, the

² Cf. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum, De l'autre femme* (Éd. De Minuit: Paris 1974); Ead., *Ce sexe qui n'est pas un* (Éd. De Minuit: Paris 1977); Ead., *L'éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Éd. De Minuit: Paris 1984); Ead., *Sexes et parentés* (Éd. De Minuit: Paris 1987).

rational, the superior, the spiritual and, on the other, the feminine, emotive, inferior, fleshly, merely material. The former is regarded as analogous to the supreme being, even God; the other is regarded as that which can be subsumed in its 'otherness' because it can be subjugated and dominated; this applies both to woman and to all matter.

These few indications show how androcentrism has drifted dangerously off course, taking the form of patriarchalism, sexism and imperialism of all kinds. So when women start working in the field of theology they unmask the patriarchal-type inculturation that theology has undergone, both in theological literature and in historical institutions.

Speaking and thinking of God

The work of women linguists, psychoanalysts and philosophers is also reflected in the way women do theology. In fact, the way we speak – and thereby think – of God is the consequence of a given, traditional approach. Heidegger revealed the fallacies of the ontotheological approach from the angle of late modernism. He considered that metaphysics in the service of Christianity was finished as a conceptual model, because it had always and increasingly failed in its chief task of 'thinking of Being' in terms of individual human beings and their *Dasein* (being-there) through the ages. Women, now starting to think about on their lives and the corresponding God, are noticing the need for unprecedented linguistic instruments, different conceptual categories and new symbols. They have decreed the end of one-way thinking, which also confirms the exhaustion of a certain line of theology, thereby highlighting the primordial and necessary connection of philosophy and theology.

Feminist thought can breathe new life into the crisis of late modernism; perhaps it will even be able to suggest a way forward. The present cultural upheavals give women theologians the opportunity to rediscover the interrelation between philosophy and theology. The latter basically has no other subject matter than God, whereas for the former, speaking of God means relying on human wisdom. Rediscovering this ancient association, feminist thinkers offer their own cultures a chance to take a step forward, beyond the *impasse* of the declared deaths – of the subject, of God – and of the death feared and proclaimed by the world. Women philosophers and theologians are taking up the Enlightenment ideals on which Europe and the West are still founded, committing themselves to liberty, equality and *sorority*, a concept which in its feminine form is causing a new blossoming of the less recognised and practised case of sisterhood. These women scholars share a common style – they strive,

at least ideally, to affirm the value of exchange between equals as being more important than individual affirmation.

To start with the person – feminist thinkers, following the golden thread of ‘difference’ and the related topic of limits, are breaking away from modernism. Cartesianism distinguished between mind and matter, exalting the former and devaluing the latter. By contrast, feminist protagonists are relational; in their intricate physical complexity they admit to being dependent on ‘something else’. Moreover, while Nietzsche proclaimed the death of the metaphysical God, for women, now compensating for their absence in history, God has never died. And as for the world, they regard it with the concern owed to a living organism needing to be healed, and not as matter to be endlessly dominated and exploited.

These issues open up a complexity of discourse that pervades the whole culture of our age. In the latter is inserted the strength of the women who have become aware of ‘being-two’ as an ontological valence and of difference as a paradigm of values. The deconstruction of androcentrism (declined as logocentrism, Eurocentrism, phallocentrism, patriarchy, sexism, racism), has, like a low tide, revealed unseen riches. Feminist theology is particularly familiar with this experience, springing from liberation theology, which sets out to denounce the injustices perpetrated by the dominant culture to the detriment of the poorest peoples of the planet. Feminist theologians have recognised in sexism the most widespread form of racism which involves every race, every social context and every nation.

The liberation and transformation of female sexuality involves a conquest which should be worldwide. The claims of gender, moreover, go beyond the limits of a purely biological definition of a person’s sex to embrace symbolic, social, cultural and relational aspects. Women theologians are thus exploring ways of talking about God on the basis of their feminist experience, of a society in transformation, of the awareness of sexual difference. Such difference concerns both genders inasmuch as both males and females find themselves to be different when confronted with what they are not. The duality of gender prevents them from thinking of themselves monadically, also giving a radical awareness of limits. Persons are defined, or limited, by belonging to a sex, and this is a way of expressing their humanity that is never self-imposing, never neutral and never abstract. More than by our death, the annihilation and suspension of the senses, we are limited by the manner of our birth, which obliges us to recognise our dependence as we start out in life. After all, each of us was born of a woman.

Female genealogies

This topic introduces a topic dear to all women thinkers – “female genealogies”. Within a patriarchal culture, women were forgotten, or occasionally mentioned in their ancillary function. The work of historians and biblical exegetes was largely dedicated to the great enterprise of rescuing from oblivion the faces and voices of women. For historical and exegetical research, rediscovering the feminine means discussing tradition, its hermeneutics and its concrete realisations. For political and economic research, in turn, it means denouncing the number of “missing” women, suffocated by misery and violence. Past and present offer a common calling for anyone who challenges them with eyes sensitive to differences.

In Italy this research is producing a wealth of publications both in state or private universities and even in the pontifical universities or institutes of religious studies. In fact, for reasons linked to the circumstances of national unification, the presence of the Vatican and Catholic predominance, there is unfortunately still a division between secular and theological faculties in Italy: the former do not accord posts to theology and in the latter teaching is strongly linked to the ecclesial magisterium; there is no reciprocal recognition of degrees. As in other countries, women in Italy became more interested in theology after Vatican II and, having finally been given permission, they are entering theological faculties in increasing numbers.

Regarding feminist genealogy, feminist thinkers work either in historical research or in the field of theoretical and practical action – gestures of either symbolical or legal significance.³ Some of the thinking about difference in Italian feminism is of a crucial nature. It centres around the symbolical figure of the mother and the privileged, “trusting” relations between women, as an acknowledgement of the original debt of gratitude we owe our mothers. “Sisterhood” is also realised in the singling out of “mothers”, to whom reference may be made either to reconstruct a tradition that is not purely masculine or to invent archetypes and symbols corresponding directly to feminine identity.

³ See for example in different fields of research: Adriana Valerio, *Cristianesimo al femminile. Donne protagoniste nella storia delle Chiese* (D’Auria: Napoli 1990); Luisa Muraro, *L’ordine simbolico della madre* (Editori Riuniti: Roma 1993); Gabriella Zarri, *La memoria di lei. Storia delle donne, storia di genere* (SEI: Torino 1996); Michela Zucca, *Donne delinquenti. Storie di streghe, eretiche, ribelli, rivoltose, tarantolate* (Edizioni Giuridiche Simone: Napoli 2004); Elena Loewenthal, *Eva e le altre. Letture bibliche al femminile* (Bompiani: Milano 2005).

This involves both implementing a policy in favour of symbols and engaging in a creative interpretation of biblical texts.

While for Judeo-Christian theology a fundamental reference is to the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”, we now hear a new diction, itself biblical, referring to the “God of Sarah and Rebecca; the God of Leah and Rachel”, the matriarchs. The God of the mothers may be thought of as the God of history, *foemineo modo*. And this is a line taken by some women theologians, who opt to devote themselves to the task of interpreting the *patrimonium fidei* with creative intelligence, but without rejecting it. Another line taken by feminists, but less common in Italy, is that of seeking alternative ways of thinking about the divine. More than to historical revelation or metaphysics, they appeal to prehistoric, ancient or medieval mythology relating to goddesses, divinities and other female figures connected with them. This second group, less convincing academically, seeks to rename the sacred. Besides the God of history, they think and speak of the God of life as a mysterious core, asexual and non-anthropomorphic.

The language of faith is being renewed in the attention to “feminine genealogy”. Concepts once so venerated in Christian – particularly Roman Catholic – tradition, like “maternity” or “virginity”, are taking on other meanings. “Virginity” indicates freshness and promise, and, at the same time, the fullness of a woman’s faithfulness to herself: her integrity, not in the mere physical sense, but involving her whole identity. “Maternity” demonstrates fertility and, in the specific case of Mary “Theotokos” (Mother of God), total newness. This is the most extraordinary example of feminine genealogy: in a patriarchal tradition the fact of referring to the mother instead of the father signifies something new and revolutionary, upsetting the recognised, established order and future expectations. The genealogy of Jesus included other female names, representing in themselves ruptures in a given historical continuity, quite apart from his acceptance of foreign or marginalised women, who are consequently dignified through recognition. The God of Jesus Christ is also the God whom he reveals to the women he meets: from the Samaritan woman to Mary Magdalene, rediscovered as a “mother” of the early church.

Women theologians are striving to give new significance to tradition, and to be holistic, rather than seeking matriarchal hegemony as an antidote to the millennia of patriarchy. This is stimulating and leavening research conducted not by a single gender but shared by the most open-minded scholars. Male philosophers are now also turning to topics traditionally neglected, or at least relatively unexplored, and which are now being raised to the theoretical level:

the interest in passions, emotions, desire and difference do not solely concern the female mode of being. Yet feminists have played a considerable role in tackling these issues, covering questions linked to the body and relationships, along with narrative methods. These questions are expressed within a knowledge proceeding from itself, from a single self, sexed, incarnate, and finally symbolical, thus unique/universal.

Choices in the field of research also indicate a specific presence: women scholars have rejected the dichotomy that situated women on the side of irrationality, of feeling, and not of enlightened reason. Instead they are refocusing on the cognitive valence of the emotions, and in so doing, show the fallacy of dichotomous analysis. Thinking about difference takes place at the point where nature and culture meet; the topic of sex-gender illustrates this well, highlighting the idea that the natural act of procreation is also a human act. Feminist scholars are attracted to the flourishing of the human as a fundamental issue, and explore it from all possible angles, ranging from the law – underlining those thresholds below which human dignity is no longer recognised and indicating the elements essential for a good life – to spirituality, that inexhaustible ability to celebrate the mystery dwelling in the whole universe.

Feminist groups and networks

Feminist groups have also sprung up with an interest in different disciplines: from politics and social affairs to spirituality. Christian women theologians from different denominations are not hampered by any prejudice towards each other. Indeed, this research has opened up new opportunities for lively comparisons with other religious backgrounds, in a country with a huge Catholic majority and a tiny Protestant minority. Unfortunately, because of the social problems, the large numbers of immigrant women from different ethnic groups now living in Italy do not generally have access to higher education, and thus their voice is not yet heard in academic circles.

In Italy women have formed many groups that meet to celebrate their Christian faith in unconventional ways. For example, there are “base communities” in different Italian cities, the organisation “Coordinamento Teologhe Italiane” (coordination of Italian women theologians), “Gruppo Promozione Donna” (group for the promotion of women), “La libera Università delle donne” (the free women’s university), the “Grael” (grail) of Milan, the “Cerchio della Luna Piena” (full moon group), “Thea”, “Identità e Differenza” (identity and difference), “Femmis”, and “Agar” (Hagar) in the Venice region. These

attempts to celebrate and reflect on the mysteries of faith have considerable creative and innovative potential, although they sometimes run the risk of overdoing it and adopting extreme or naïve positions. Such positions may also reduce the credibility of a seriously transformational commitment, as always happens in revolutions.

Catholic women theologians have a hard time confronting the official positions of the magisterium and meeting with real recognition for in their proposals. An interesting event was the *Letter to the Bishops on the collaboration of men and women in the church and in the world* (July 2004) issued by the former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, today Benedictus XVI. It sparked a broad debate and was the first time that an authoritative Vatican document had taken account of the reality of feminist thinking, even if in tones of dissent.

Clericalism is a formidable obstacle, and so is secularism. The latter frequently takes the form of indifference, ignorance and prejudice expressed by women. For this reason it is ever more urgent to organise associations and research groups, also at the university level. Women theologians and academics involved in historical and biblical studies are present in many universities and collaborate in different study centres: since 2003 they have found in the “Coordinamento Teologhe Italiane” (CTI) an important space for specialised research and an instrument for debate and exchange between women researchers from different Christian traditions. There is also the “Centro Adelaide Pignatelli per gli studi storico-religiosi sulle donne” (Adelaide Pignatelli centre for historical and religious women’s studies), founded by Adriana Valerio, the “Istituto Costanza Scelfo” for problems concerning lay people and women in the Church, and the “Associazione Mariologica Italiana”. I mention this last organisation not as a feminist association but to stress that even mariological reflection is receiving refreshing new impetus through feminist studies.

While in Protestant circles the figure of Mary used to be a non-issue, there is a long Catholic tradition of Marian piety, sometimes expressed in devotional forms now obsolete for contemporary believers, or in images with which women cannot identify. Gender studies have agreed to (re-)discover the character of Mary of Nazareth, defining its historical contours and re-interpreting her symbolic attributes described above. She is a woman of her age and personifies its dramas; she is the protagonist of a sacred narrative; she is a disciple of a new community in which she plays a cardinal role.

Women also rediscover their own mothers and teachers in their commitment to research. The group “Diotima”, inspired by Socrates’ teacher, brings

together women with a variety of philosophical interests. This community of women philosophers has met since 1983 in association with the University of Verona. “Diotima” has published widely; its seminar activities are led *inter alia* by Luisa Muraro, in conjunction with the “Libreria delle donne di Milano” (Milan women’s bookshop), which since 1975 has sought to highlight women’s thinking and writing. These are not strictly academic associations but in line with the most classical calling of philosophy, they aim to stimulate thinking and political action on relations, in this case between women.

The starting point of these researchers is “thinking about difference” as an attempt to achieve an anthropological-philosophical construction of identity. Amongst her other works, Luisa Muraro is the author of a volume that has enjoyed considerable success, *Il dio delle donne* (the God of women).⁴ Dedicated to two figures taken from the feminine mystique with the intention of expounding a “mother-tongue theology”, it dismantles the methodological presupposition according to which mothers are there to care for the body and give unconditional affection while fathers provide access to the world and the mediation of language.

The last few years have seen an impressive number of publications about the historical and social reality of women, the topic of gender and the idea of difference.⁵ From different perspectives these have considered the history of language, philosophy and theology, exegesis and law, ethics of iconography and music. Other studies have considered the presence of women in religious institutions, spirituality, liturgy and pastoral care.

⁴ Luisa Muraro, *Il dio delle donne* (Mondadori: Milano 2003).

⁵ Cf. for example DIOTIMA (a cura di), *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (1987, riedito presso La Tartaruga: Milano 2003); *Mettere al mondo il mondo. Oggetto e oggettività alla luce della differenza sessuale* (La Tartaruga: Milano 1990); *Il cielo stellato dentro di noi. L'ordine simbolico della madre* (La Tartaruga: Milano 1992); *Oltre l'uguaglianza. Le radici femminili dell'autorità* (Liguori: Napoli 1995); *La sapienza del partire da sé* (Liguori: Napoli 1996); *Il profumo della maestra. Nei laboratori della vita quotidiana* (Liguori: Napoli 1999); *Approfondire dell'assenza. Puntì di avvistamento sulla tradizione* (Liguori: Napoli 2002).

And Autori Vari, *La donna: memoria e attualità*. Vol. I: *Una lettura secondo l'antropologia, la teologia e la bioetica* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Rome 1999); *La donna: memoria e attualità*. Vol. II, 1: *Donna e esperienza di Dio nei solchi della storia* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Rome 2000); *La donna: memoria e attualità*. Vol. II, 2: *Donna e esperienza di Dio nei solchi della storia* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Rome 2000); *La donna: memoria e attualità*. Vol. I: *Donna e religioni non Cristiane* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Rome 2001); *La donna: memoria e attualità*. Vol. III: *Donna e religioni cristiane* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Rome 2002).

This dynamic setting of cultural rethinking includes the *Archivio per la Storia delle Donne* (archive for the history of women), founded by Adriana Valerio and associated with the Neapolitan publisher M. D'Auria (2004). This centre has two inspiring forerunners: *L'Archivio per la Storia della Pietà* (the archive for the history of piety), founded in 1951 by Giuseppe de Luca, and the *Archiv für philosophie- und theologiegeschichtliche Frauenforschung* (archive for women's studies in the field of philosophical and theological history), founded in Munich in 1984 by the German theologian Elisabeth Gössmann.

L'Archivio in Naples specialises in the publication of hitherto unpublished works relative to women's writing and thought. Such sources, introduced and analysed philologically, offer researchers rare and precious materials, which lend themselves to many and varied connections at the level of interpretation and circulation of ideas, in which the male and female codes interact, dialectically indicating the warp and weft of our social and cultural fabric.

Similarly, publishing collections and cultural initiatives are springing up on gender issues, like "La Dracma" (the drachma), a collection dedicated to studies of women and Christianity, published by D'Auria, mentioned above.

These significant activities are not yet sufficient, however, to give the question of feminist thought a really high profile in intellectual circles and the media. Even in university departments it is still hard work trying to introduce the topic through appropriate courses and studies. Women's Studies as a discipline does not yet exist in Italy and there is still some mistrust towards it, and a tendency to look down on it academically. However, some initiatives are taking shape: these include master's programmes, as at the University of Rome III ("Trainers and experts in equal opportunity", organized by Francesca Brezzi), along with courses and first degree theses on the main ideas and leading figures in feminist thought and history. These are received with great interest by women students.

Female sensibility

'Being-woman' involves extending beyond the purely female: everyone, men as well as women, has a biological mother. And 'being-woman' is experienced in living mediation, rather than in rational planning. God, too, in female terms, is 'thought' as the mystery whose being passes through our being-there; hence for Mary, this happens in the experience of regeneration, waiting, fulfilment. Women therefore try not to be an obstacle, so that 'Other' can pass. Sin, too, is regarded by women from a different angle: they do not suffer from the sin

of pride or lust so much as from self-abnegation. Historically and traditionally educated to be dependent, women find it difficult to experience the virtue of self-reliance in all spheres of human life.⁶

So feminists are creating new paradigms and inventing different universals. Their commitment to recuperating misrepresented spheres and struggling against conceptual prejudice corresponds to the needs of our world, characterised by complexity and globalisation. Women theologians who have united without regard for denominational background and are pursuing their inquiries in ecumenical, and inter-faith, contexts enjoy the free experience of multicultural reality, interweaving identity and difference.

The centrality of the categories of otherness and difference highlighted in feminist interpretation is particularly interesting for current philosophical discourse, which is engaging with a globalised world, populated with particularisms and in need of multicultural and inter-faith dialogue. In this field, too, women theologians are on familiar ground, since, from its inception, theology done by women to ‘think about women’ has always used the plural, never the singular. There are many feminist theologies, depending on cultural background and religion of reference. The multicultural and inter-faith approach is essential for the development of feminist theology, which is then increasingly finding a home for itself in an ecumenical context.

Italian women researchers feel challenged by scholars from other countries, above all from the South, in different areas, notably in ecology, which has produced fascinating Indian (and American) studies on “ecofeminism”.⁷ This approach links the commitment to transform and liberate women with the concern to care for Mother Earth, that fragile and compromised organism which interconnects everything and everyone, and which has been exploited as if it were no-man’s land. It is to be hoped that in this field, too, Italian women thinkers may make their contribution. They have already done so on ethical topics such as questions of crossing boundaries in bioethics, and there is also a community of women in scientific research known as “Ipazia”. Italian feminists have already had the opportunity to reflect from all angles on topics ranging from assisted reproduction to abortion.

⁶ Cf. Lilia Sebastiani, *Morale personale* (Piemme: Casale Monferrato (AL) 1991); Muraro, *Il Dio delle donne*.

⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia e Dio. Una teologia ecofemminista per la guarigione della terra* (Queriniana: Brescia 1995); Vandana Shiva, *Terra madre. Sopravvivere allo sviluppo* (UTET: Torino 2004).

Feminist theological research, strictly and usefully interrelated with philosophy, is working on defining female subjectivity, aiming for a concept of wholeness, and thus for an ecclesiology of communion. The challenge is to develop an ethos of reciprocity, and women have taken it up primarily for themselves – being historically incapable of sisterhood – and thus for their own traditions. The hope is that horizons will open up for the creation of an authentic relationship with the most profound being, which may be a person, the pulsating universe, or divine mystery. The patrimony of faith may then perhaps translate into a ‘matrimony’ based on love for our fellow human beings.

Translation from the Italian: Elaine Griffiths

Der Artikel setzt bei der historischen Perspektive an, indem er von der feministischen Bewegung im Kampf für die Gleichheit der politischen und zivilen Rechte ausgeht. Die weitere Reflexion konzentriert sich deshalb auf die Frage der “Differenz”, die zusammen mit der Gleichheit und über diese hinaus unbedingt zu berücksichtigen ist. Der Text unterstreicht die Themen, denen die italienischen Denkerinnen (Historikerinnen, Biblikern, Philosophinnen oder Theologinnen) in den letzten Jahren ihre besondere Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet haben. Als grundlegende Herausforderung erscheint die Ausarbeitung von adäquaten Paradigmen und Symbolen, die das Weibliche in seiner Besonderheit und Autonomie repräsentieren und konzeptualisieren: Es tauchen deshalb jene fundamentalen Themen wie die matrilineare Genealogie, die Besonderheit des Geschlechts, die Sorge für Dinge und Personen, das Denken des Göttlichen, und Beispiele von Frauen auf. Um das Bild zu vervollständigen, wurde der Bezug zu den zahlreichen Forschungsgruppen hergestellt, die in verschiedenen Bereichen in Italien arbeiten.

L'article partant de la perspective historique du mouvement féministe en lutte pour l'égalité des droits politiques et civils, la réflexion se concentre sur la question de la «différence» pensée comme instance à respecter en même temps que l'égalité et au-delà d'elle. Le texte fait ressortir les thèmes sur lesquels les penseuses italiennes (historiennes, biblistes, philosophes ou théologiennes) ont porté plus particulièrement leur attention ces dernières années. La principale exigence paraît être d'élaborer des paradigmes et des symboles adaptés à la représentation et à la conceptualisation du féminin dans ce qu'il a de particulier et d'autonome: c'est pourquoi y apparaissent des thèmes fondamentaux comme la généalogie matrilineaire, la spécificité du genre, l'attention pour les choses et les êtres, la pensée du divin, exemples de femmes. Pour compléter le tableau, il est fait référence aux nombreux groupes de recherche qui opèrent à divers titres en Italie.

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