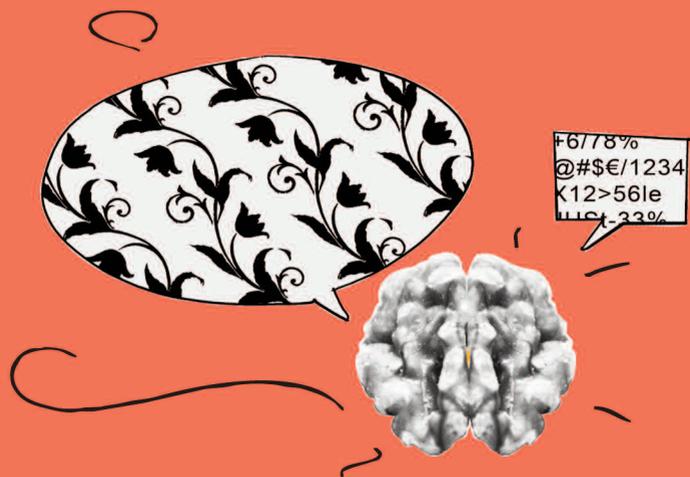


booklets

WOMEN OF CARE

Justice, Care and Transformation



WOMEN OF CARE
JUSTICE, CARE AND TRANSFORMATION

Lucía Ramón

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INTRODUCTION

In this booklet I want to explore certain aspects of life that take on a new dimension when viewed from a feminine perspective: first, the relation between happiness and caring for persons; and second, the relation between justice and the transformation of society.

The first chapter highlights the philosophy of Jesus as presented in the parables and explains how in the Gospel justice and caring for others are intimately linked.

In the second chapter, which looks to the Exodus, caring women who are also transgressors collaborate in Yahweh's project of life and justice. As an indispensable element of relationship, caring becomes a form of salvation. Calling for care in politics and society is imperative for an integral vision of faith.

In the third chapter I want to offer some cogent reflections on the negative implications that have resulted from the moral and social specialization of women.

And finally, chapters four and five offer a new feminist paradigm of the revolution in feeling that is required in order for us all to grow in love and make this world more livable.

1. CARE, JUSTICE AND HAPPINESS

«I disheveled my shadows and you appeared:
the brightest thread in the fabric.»

Claribel Alegria

In one of the most beautiful texts of the Hebrew Bible, Isaiah 58, the prophet presents us with an exceptional path to happiness. I invite you to reread the oracle from this perspective, and not in the moralizing way we usually read it.

1.1. On the path of Wisdom

The prophet speaks not of what *we have* to do, but of the path that leads us to boundless well-being and personal integration, which he describes in terms of life, abundance, and plenitude. The terms used by Isaiah proclaim healing and reparation, relationship, communion, and acknowledgement; he most definitely defends the dignity of all persons. Fasting, as a private religious practice between the believer and God, becomes secondary. Fasting is not an end in itself, nor does it basically serve to please God. What God wants is a different kind of worship, one that makes communion with God possible and serves as a means

for achieving individual and collective happiness. Isaiah expresses forcefully a conviction he shares with the whole prophetic tradition of Israel: such communion with God is sundered by injustice and lack of care for one another. What is more, no religious practice divorced from care and justice can ever reestablish the communion.

1.2. The treasure, the pearl and the widow

Jesus of Nazareth, in continuity with this prophetic tradition, also speaks of a God who is *Abba*. His vision is not especially religious, if we understand

religion to be an introspective activity separated from the rest of life. Jesus is the manifestation of a God who is profoundly relational, a God for whom tenderness, care, and justice are inseparable from profound religious experience. This vital attitude, along with corresponding social practices, makes manifest the experience of having been reached by the grace of God, of being loved by unconditional Love, and of being inhabited by the divine Sophia. It is here that authentic affinity with the Spirit and with the Crucified and Risen One is verified.

Often we lose sight of this dimension of *happiness* in the Gospel, reducing the message of Jesus to morality or, even worse, moralism. But we are constantly challenged by the way in which Jesus saw and interpreted what was happening around him. His parables force us to question the logic by which we often “explain” and domesticate the Gospel to the point of concealing its newness and rendering it mute. There are two parables and one text that I believe can help us to broaden our conception of justice in the light of the Gospel. Jesus presents us with a much richer vision of justice than that offered us by modern political or ethical traditions or by the left-leaning political culture of many persons concerned about justice. According to the Gospel, as we will see throughout this booklet, justice and care, equity and reciprocity, gratuity and abundance of heart are inseparable. This conviction, rooted in the very being of God, has been the constant experience of the great believers of the Judeo-Christian tradition

for centuries and it still is today. This is especially true of women, as we will see further on.

But first we should let ourselves be confronted by the words of Jesus about the treasure, the pearl, and the widow.

«The kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the Kingdom of God is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.» (Mt 13,44-46)

«And in the hearing of all the people Jesus said to his disciples: “Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and love salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation”.

He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had.”» (Lk 20,45-37; 21,1-4)

The parables of the treasure and the pearl and the story of the widow’s offering, an action Jesus contrasts with the offering of the scribes and the

wealthy, make it quite clear that God's justice contradicts all our fine calculations and pretentious efforts. If anything comes through plainly in the parables about the man who found the treasure and the merchant of fine pearls, it is that life, as understood by the prophet Jesus, is highly unpredictable and can be programmed only with difficulty. In this case, the opportunity for entering into the kingdom of God and its saving justice is presented as something unexpected: as such, it is an opportunity for happiness that we can easily let escape. Moreover, for those who live by exclusively worldly criteria—power, wealth, prestige—the opportunity is easily ignored, since it is revealed in acts and events of little significance for their “calculating” logic. Those who practice God's justice are often the persons who are invisible or “made invisible” in society, like the widow. Like her, such people are condescendingly pitied by those who believe themselves righteous observers of the law. The “observant” ones judge reality by appearances. They place great importance on people's rank in the social hierarchy, on their “dignity” or religious “purity” as measured by their observance of the law. For them it is the scribes who are “righteous” and the wealthy who are blameless, since they faithfully fulfill the religious precepts and do not even “see” the widow.

As in the oracle of Isaiah, the justice proclaimed as Good News by Jesus of Nazareth is presented in the two parables as salvation and blessing, as an offering of happiness. It is justice that goes beyond duty; it overflows the

sphere of obligation, of pure voluntarism, of what is the norm in society. It is born from some other source, from the abundance of the heart, and it manifests itself in that same abundance, as the parable of the widow makes clear. The justice which the Gospel summons us to practice is a *greater justice*, proceeding from the measureless, gratuitous, and unconditional Love from which we come, the Love which called us into existence and sustains us in being. It is toward that Love, which grants joy, happiness, and plenitude, that we are moving.

1.3. An unforeseeable transformation: the miser who gave up calculating for the sake of happiness

«When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, Jesus answered them: “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you”.» (Lk 17,20-21)

It is curious that the evangelist Luke, after declaring how difficult it is for the rich to be saved, goes on a few verses later to tell of the salvation of an unscrupulous scoundrel. How is it possible that such a corrupt character can be converted by his encounter with Jesus? Once again the Gospel breaks with all purely human logic. I propose here an explanation which may open us up to another kind of logic. The transformation of Zaccheus (Lk 19,1-9) is about an

experience of the God who desires us and loves us unconditionally. In his encounter with Jesus, Zaccheus experiences a God who wants to be welcomed into every human life, even when the life is in total disarray. It is a God who does not judge us but bestows his blessing on everyone who wishes to offer him hospitality. It is a God who is able to transform the hearts of those who open their hearts to him with confidence and allow him to enter their lives. It is a God who calls us to a fullness which will be given us beyond measure, beyond all our expectations and limitations, beyond all our achievements and failures. God has made us in his image and so has given us a capacity to love and to live in liberty. He invites us every day to grow in our likeness to him, to mature in love. He reminds us that selfishness and small-mindedness diminish and impoverish us both individually and collectively, whereas the exercise of compassionate, intelligent tenderness allows us to flourish and to share with others the beauties of life. God's desire for creation and for humanity is unbounded happiness. Often we find this expressed in the Hebrew Bible and in the parables and practice of Jesus through the image of a great banquet, where everyone shares in abundant life and total joy.

1.4. Christianity as a proposal for the *good life* and *good living*

«The great mystery of happiness is that it cannot be reduced to those components which allow it to appear

or which prevent it from appearing: as much as we may bring the components together in ideal combination, happiness exceeds them all. It does not let itself be delimited or defined, and it disintegrates like a butterfly's wings as soon as we think we have it in our hands. But above all, life has the structure of a promise, not that of a program. In a way, being born means being promised to a promise, to a future which palpitates before us but of which we know nothing.»² (Pascal Bruckner)

Christianity is not a program. It is an experience of life, a way of being in the world based on confidence in a promise. Christianity, rooted in faith and trust in the person and the promise of Jesus, proposes a style of *good life* and *good living*. This means dwelling joyfully, responsibly, and generously in this world, where our central concerns are caring for every living being and working for justice. Our faith invites us to transform what is often a hostile terrain or a barren desert into a more human world, a more habitable home. I am convinced that one of the most urgent tasks for our theologies today is articulating and proclaiming this Christian proposal for a happy life and situating it within the new social contexts and globalized horizons.

Certain authors, notably Rafael Díaz Salazar and José Laguna, have described this *ethos* as a Samaritan lifestyle or a Samaritan culture.³ In this booklet I want to explore certain aspects of Samaritan living that take on new dimensions when viewed from a femi-

nist perspective: I want to examine the relations among caring for persons, justice, and the transformation of society.

I wish to emphasize one essential aspect that is sometimes obscured in our discourse about God and Christianity: the Gospel as proclamation of abundant life for the whole human community and as experience of the abundance of God's heart. The Gospel offers us the possibility of becoming ourselves

channels of grace and blessing for others, thus making it possible for all to partake in the banquet of creation. This project, which is already underway, is not an unrealizable utopia, but a reality that is painfully coming to birth in history, even if not yet realized in its fullness. It is a reality that has already begun among us whenever we establish the new order of human relationships to which Jesus invites us.

2. WOMEN OF CARE

«I The basket of Moses did not go under
because a breath of love kept it company.»

Claribel Alegria

The infancy of Moses was surrounded by women transgressors, *women of care*, in the twofold meaning of that expression. Without their collaboration Yahweh's project of life and justice for his people would never have gotten underway.

2.1. The women of Exodus as a paradigm for relating care, justice, and salvation

Miriam was the first woman called a prophet in the Bible (Ex 15,20). Sent by God along with her brothers, Moses and Aaron, to respond to the cries and the suffering of the Israelites under the yoke of the Egyptians, Miriam was a protagonist and a witness of the people's liberation. From the very start this brave visionary saw that Yahweh's providence was working out the salvation of his people with the help of women, especially the network of compassionate women who protected her defenseless

brother from the abyss of death. These women took an active part in this salvific drama, for they were able to see in the weakness of a helpless infant the liberating force of God acting in history.

These Hebrew women are a paradigm of the close relation that exists between justice and care. Such a relation makes the good life and salvation available to all, beginning with the last and the least. Far from any spiritualist vision, salvation became reality in the daily life of these women when they responded freely and promptly by opening their hearts to the forlorn child. In this way they became channels of

grace for Moses, saving him from the waters of death, and also for the whole Hebrew people, who were suffering political domination and economic exploitation. The God who takes pity and intervenes in history on behalf of those who are suffering always does so with the collaboration of bold, decisive persons like these women.

The narration of the book of Exodus describes in detail how the women “plotted” the salvation of the child and how the convergence of their individual decisions in favor of life completely reversed what seemed a hopeless situation, given the unequal balance of forces. The Pharaoh had ordered his men to throw all recently born Hebrew boys into the Nile, but thanks to the resistance of a handful of wise, courageous, and compassionate women, Moses survived. The Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah, the first conscientious objectors of history, found a way to subvert the Pharaoh’s orders to kill the newborn boys, without being killed themselves for their defiance (Ex 1). Then the mother of Moses, after giving birth to the child and «seeing how beautiful he was», hid him away for three months. The Hebrew text here uses the same expression found in the Genesis creation story: *tob*, which means good, gracious, lovely, fitting. It is a term indicating good fortune and delight. The mother who just gave birth marveled before the beauty and the goodness of the fruit of her womb, just as God in the creation story marveled upon contemplating the beauty and the goodness of his creation, its wholeness and its dignity. When Moses’ mother

could no longer hide him, she decided to put him in a basket on the shore of the Nile, with the hope that someone would find him. Meanwhile Miriam, his sister, «stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him». When the Pharaoh’s daughter discovered the basket with the child in it, she felt compassion even though it was a Hebrew child. At that point Miriam, who was there, watching everything, decided to intervene. She proposed to the princess that she seek out a Hebrew woman to nurse the child, and she arranged for the child’s mother to be brought. The child was then raised in his family of origin and later brought back to the Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopted him as her son and gave him the name Moses (Ex 2,1-10). We are told nothing about the father of Moses.

This text reflects a special sensitivity found in women, a sensitivity which goes beyond cultural, religious, and historical differences. In our day as well, women take the lead in searching for their children when they are snatched away by wars and dictatorships. Women are the first to organize protests when environmental disasters threaten the life, the health, or the subsistence of their children and the community. In the story of Moses, the midwives, the mother, and the princess decided to ignore the strategies dictated by men. Over against the Pharaoh’s ruthless political logic, the women were in favor of life. By virtue of their innate tenderness and their sensitivity to beauty and value, they became collaborators in God’s plans and in the work of salvation.

Miriam successfully prepared the ways of liberation. She never lost hope but remained vigilant, always observing and intervening at the opportune moment. The compassion of these women stood in stark contrast to the stubborn hard-heartedness of the Pharaoh, which became more evident in the course of the story (Ex 7,3). Later on, when Moses offered Pharaoh the role of liberator of the people, he was so obsessed by his power that he refused the offer (Ex 32,15). His love of power overrode his love of life, so that in the end God brought down his pride. As the Pharaoh suffered a disastrous defeat, Miriam was there to sing of the greatness of her God. All the women danced to the rhythm of her tambourine, celebrating their liberation from oppression, as God had promised (Ex 15,20-21). And the God of life, joy, and liberty danced with them.

2.2. The labor of radical love

«If non-violence is the law of human nature, then the future belongs to women.» (M.K. Gandhi)

Care has a lot to do with relationship, with being able to love, with understanding and accepting the feelings of others, with trying to meet their needs, with recognizing and reaffirming their dignity and autonomy, and with assuring them fullness of life. Feminist theological ethics has insisted strongly on the ethical importance of relation and care. Theologian Beverly Wildung Harrison has defined Christian ethics as the labor of radical love, which consists in the daily struggles to create a flesh-and-

blood community committed to love and justice.⁴ The historical experience of women shows us that *activity* is central to loving, and this insight inspires a Christian spirituality and an ethics of care and justice which pays more attention to the importance of relationships than simply to analyses of a structural nature.

In all cultures around the world women have had and continue to have as their primary responsibility the daily activities which make human survival possible. For that reason, in all civilizations the true power of women, which has still not been adequately recognized, resides in their being the architects of what is most human in the person. They have been and still are the principal creators of human dignity and community: «The lives of women of women are exceptional not only for their ability to transmit life in a biological sense but for their power to nourish and care for life, which is a social and cultural force. Although our culture has downplayed the role of women, this nutritive power is formidable». Over against the image of “the good woman” invented by bourgeois spirituality, «women have always been a living example of the *power of activity* rather than passivity, of experimentation rather than routine, of creativity and risk rather than conventional solutions».

Drawing on these historical experiences, Christian feminist theologies around the world, especially the eco-feminist currents, build their ethics around the radical moral creativity of human beings, their power to create a moral world of relations. From this

historical experience, we women discover that being a moral subject consists in being a *reciprocal agent* who creates bonds with others, so that a person's identity and personality is shaped by those with whom he or she relates.

This implies an enormous responsibility that has been underestimated by traditional Christian ethics: the power of action in love or the negation of same. Christian theological ethics must place relationship at the center; it must consider the tremendous truth that we have the ability, through our acts of love or indifference, to create one another or to destroy one another. This is something often forgotten when we focus spirituality exclusively on interiority and the relation with the sacred or when we reduce it to moral analysis of our purity of intention. Spirituality is something more than a purely abstract consideration of love or an examination of normative questions. But just as we have a hard time understanding the immense power of love, which is the ability to act among-one-another-for-good, so also we have difficulty in measuring our power to mutilate one another and sabotage lives. Seeking an alternative to a moral vision that is excessively individualist or purely abstract and rational, Harrison poses a key question for theological ethics and spirituality. Both of these should help us to become aware that «we have the fateful option either of allowing God's love to work freely in the world or of denying one another what is most basic for the person and the community». From a theological perspective, this radical power of human activity is the

crucial element in the drama of God and human beings.

We are like God, not in our “human power” or domination of others, but in *the labor of love*, which consists «in deepening and broadening human relations, in communication, in attentive affection for others, in strengthening community bonds». The power to refuse to receive and give love, and so refuse the gift of life, is more fearsome than the power of technology, and at the same time more fragile and complex.

In a complex, globalized world, the labor of radical love demands that we exercise an intelligent, creative passion and develop a spirituality of resistance. The economic logic of the market is not compatible with the human logic of care. As in the times of the women of Exodus, we need today an ethics and a spirituality of intelligent, political compassion.

2.3. The feminist claim for care: the voice of care and the voice of justice

Toward the end of the 1970s, Carol Gilligan placed *care* at the center of ethical debate, thus rescuing the silenced moral voice of women. Her studies in the psychology of moral development showed that men and women tend to resolve moral dilemmas in different ways. Gilligan demonstrated the existence of two languages for codifying the moral world: the “feminine voice” and the “masculine voice”. The feminine preference for contextualized moral judgments, which valorize relations as opposed to the

masculine preference for universal judgments, is not evidence of any deficiency, but simply a different moral viewpoint. The values esteemed by the masculine moral viewpoint favor autonomous individuals who are capable of making impartial decisions about what is just and unjust. The feminine moral viewpoint considers ways of protecting human relations; it is concerned for the weak and in each instance considers concrete persons in the context of concrete actions. Whereas the ethics of justice concentrates on general moral principles and considers moral problems in terms of conflicts of rights, *the ethics of care* concentrates on the adoption of concrete behaviors of attention and solidarity toward those who are most fragile and impoverished.⁵

Are we to understand this differentiation in the sense that the former is the language of men and the latter the language of women? Not at all. Rather than a gender difference, we are talking

about how these values are dissociated in each man and each woman. It is a question of a functional division of tasks and of the devaluation of care with respect to justice. Although men and women will incline statistically more in one direction than another, the *ethics of justice* and the *ethics of compassion* are necessary qualities in both sexes for achieving moral maturity. Both types of ethics encompass important values that every man and every woman must learn to practice. Until now traditional ethical and political theory has not considered the question of care to be relevant for ethics and public life. As feminist political theory has shown, however, caring for others is a condition of possibility of the existence of the moral subject; without such caring there is no ethics and no politics. The question of care is not simply a domestic concern; it is not just private matter as opposed to something in the public domain.

3. THE COSTS OF CARE

«To women has fallen the task of To women has fallen the task of adorning and beautifying life, while the first sex has been busy understanding it and putting it in order. The noble, serious, and important activities are carried out by men. Their realm includes politics, priesthood, war, whatever is understood as public life. The realm of the woman, on the other hand, is the private sphere: whether spouse or mother, her mission has been that of caring, gratifying, pleasing. As Kant declared, women are not made to legislate –such is not their task– but to cultivate beauty. These two norms, which put each sex in its proper place without any possibility of choice or of blending ways of life, have been the basis for all the vexations suffered by the more despised sex.»⁶ (Victoria Camps)

Because care constitutes a culture and an extremely valuable ethical heritage that we women have been acquiring over centuries, there is need for clear-headed reflection about the implication of women's moral and social specialization and about the effects that their caring role has on their lives and their opportunities. That is to say, we need to consider the consequences of making caring an informal, unremunerated activity attributed to women by nature.

3.1. The sexual division of social space and of labor

«1778, Philadelphia: If I had been born a woman... Of the sixteen brothers and sisters of Benjamin Franklin, Jane is the one most like him in talent and strength of will, but when she was as old as Benjamin was when he left home to make his way in the world, Jane married a poor saddler, who accepted her

without a dowry, and ten months later she gave birth to her first son. From that time on, for a quarter-century, Jane had a child every two years. Some of them died, and each death left a wound in her heart. Those who lived required food, shelter, instruction, and comforting. Jane spent nights awake rocking those who cried, she washed mountains of clothes, she bathed throngs of children, she ran from market to kitchen, she scrubbed towers of plates, she taught alphabets and skills, she worked side by side with her husband in the workshop, and she attended to the boarders whose contributions helped to fill the pot. Jane was a devoted spouse and exemplary widow; when she had had her full complement of children, she took care of her own ailing parents, her unmarried daughters, and her needy grandchildren.

Jane never knew the pleasure of floating in a lake and being pulled by a kite string, as was Benjamin's custom despite his years. Jane never had time to think, nor was she permitted to doubt. Benjamin was always a fervent lover, but Jane never realized that sex could be for something more than producing children.

As a found of a nation of inventors, Benjamin was a historic figure. Jane was a woman of her age, indeed a women of all ages: she did her duty on earth and expiated her portion of guilt in the biblical curse. She did what she could in order not to go crazy, and she sought, in vain, a little

silence. Her case will be lacking in interest for historians.»⁷ (Eduardo Galeano)

This account tells us of the obligatory confinement of women to the domestic world and of the sharp division between feminine and masculine functions, which has deprived women of many opportunities to develop themselves and be recognized. All of us need both autonomy and recognition if we are to become moral subjects. A widespread conception has it that the place and the mission of women is limited to the private domain. In order to fulfill her familial duty, she must renounce her sensibility, her singularity, and her desires. Women can be good mothers and spouses, *angels of the home*, only by selflessly surrendering themselves to their preordained duties.

The division of social space by genders and the assignment of care and domestic work to women is related to the view that women are defective men. Since the time of the Greeks, the feminine *difference*, women's special nature, was used to justify their subordination and to exclude them from citizenship. Political theory has traditionally placed private, domestic life –and with it women– outside the sphere of state and society. Traditional theory has not been interested in having family life organized according to principles of equality and consensus, nor has it tried to prevent domestic arrangements from restricting women's access to other forms of social life.

How has this “lacuna” of oceanic dimensions been possible? For the

prestigious political philosopher W. Kymlicka, «the obvious explanation is that male philosophers had no interest in questioning the sexual division of labor from which they benefited. This division was rationalized by arguing that domestic roles were biologically dictated, a presupposition based on affirmations about women's inferiority or more recently on the idea of the *sentimental family*, according to which the sentimental bond which arises naturally between mother and child is incompatible with the type of character needed for social or political life». ⁸ In the domestic sphere, women dedicate themselves to reproducing the conditions of possibility for the exercise of freedom by men, who are considered moral subjects par excellence.

3.2. How far have we advanced?

The bourgeois ideal of family proposed by reformers of the 19th century is the one that prevailed in our European societies until the 1960-80s. In this model of family the man works completely in the productive sector, whereas the woman works in the home, guaranteeing the reproduction of labor power. This way of organizing the family was quite advantageous for the capitalist system of production, since it allowed many costs to be shifted to the unpaid domestic sphere. The incredible juggling acts performed by women made it possible for the labor market to have round-the-clock access to valuable human capital. Even as women increasingly entered the labor force, this structure maintained its hold, for men

and women participated in the labor market and in domestic work in very different ways. ⁹ The double meaning of the word “help”, depending on gender and activity, reflects the centrality of wage labor for men and of domestic work for women: when women, especially those of the poorer classes, work for a wage, they usually speak of their work as a “help” to supplement the husband's pay; on the other hand, when the husband assists with domestic chores, then he is the one who “helps” his wife.

As women become more involved in the labor market, a new model is taking shape. Men maintain their traditional role almost intact, but women take on a double role: they earn a wage and also work as caretakers and homemakers. This extra burden has important costs for them and their quality of life. Feminist sociologists call this situation “double presence/absence” to symbolize women's being and *not* being in either place completely; they are severely limited by the situation imposed by the present organization of society. This situation, which requires women to behave like men as wage laborers and like women at home, creates a permanent tension between two completely different cultures of work: the culture of care and the culture of benefit. As a result, women have to negotiate and interiorize tensions continually; they have to make decisions and choices which men don't have to make. Moreover, this situation can lead to permanent distress because, even though they devote endless hours to domestic work and to wage labor, women simply do not

fit into a world constructed according to the masculine model.

When they have the means, upper-middle class women can find relief by paying others to do the work of caring. This work is usually done by women of a lower social class, often immigrants, who must in turn seek other women (mothers, sisters, older daughters) to work without pay to care for their children and their home. This gives rise to what is known as «worldwide chains of assistance and affection», which in reality consists in shifting the costs of care onto the backs of the women in the poorest countries. «One current form of the chain is this pattern: 1) an older daughter of a poor family cares for her younger siblings while, 2) her mother takes care of other children, 3) whose mother has emigrated and works caring for the child of a family in a rich country»¹⁰. Another alternative allowing women to work outside the home is reliance on a mother or grandmother, who now cares for the home and the children as unpaid “flexible reserve labor”.

Whatever the arrangement, the costs of the caretaking affect the physical and

mental health of women in many ways. Having little personal space for themselves, they lack free time and leisure and as a result their emotional and psychological equilibrium suffers. They are unable to participate in sports, associations, or educational activities that contribute to their integral personal development. They often delay motherhood for themselves or forego it completely. They experience conflicts with their partners. They are limited in their professional aspirations, missing out on promotions, positions of responsibility, training, etc. In a word, they experience discrimination and penalization in the labor market. And the lower the social class to which they belong, the heavier the burden.

Moreover, women represent 80% of the informal caretakers of dependent persons and 90% of those who leave paid work in order to provide care for family members. Even so, despite all the work that women do for the benefit of society, they are subjected to greater job insecurity, worse labor conditions, more health risks, and less compensation for unemployment, retirement, or disability.

4. BUT THERE IS NO JUSTICE WITHOUT CARE

Our societies have historically been based on a patriarchal vision of the world, which still prevails today.

4.1. Beyond the patriarchal order

The patriarchal mentality sees reality as dichotomized: male and female, white and black, body and spirit, human and natural. Defined in terms of opposition, these polarities establish a hierarchy in which one is superior and the other inferior. Even though culturally constructed, the hierarchy is legitimized by being declared the “natural” order of the world. That is why in many cultures women believe that they are naturally inferior to men. A truly obscene manifestation of this mentality is that even today one of the most lucrative businesses at the global level, competing with the trade in drugs and weapons, is the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women.¹¹

4.2. Universalizing the feminist cause

I share with Victoria Camps the conviction that the 21st century will be the century of women. No one can now stop this movement, which constituted the greatest revolution of the 20th century.¹² But for this revolution to exercise its liberating potential for all humanity, we need a change of social patterns at many levels: anthropological, ethical, cultural, economic, social, political, and religious. We need to universalize the feminist cause. This means much more than the fact that increasing numbers of women hold important and powerful positions in the world, or that some women are honored with prizes and recognition. We should keep in mind the

being female does not immunize a person against patriarchal values. Rather the contrary. The guardians of patriarchal power have learned that an effective strategy for maintaining the present order of things is to share their power with certain elite women so that, even after an appearance of change, everything remains the same as before.

The universalization of feminism will require much more to be done. First of all, the revolutionary changes introduced by feminism should be extended to those parts of the world that have still not experienced them. Second, these transformations need to be broadened and related to a profound social reorganization aimed at achieving greater equality. Third, in order to achieve the full emancipation of women, we need to expose the obstacles which prevent women from attaining freedom and full equality with respect to men.

I believe that the most subtle dominations we face today are in the areas where we have already attained legal equality, and they have to do with the affective and emotional sphere. Anna G. Jónnasdóttir has shown that in societies where there is legal equality the key factor is in how men and women experience love in a social system which still distributes resources and responsibilities unevenly between the genders. Underlying other forms of exploitation of women there exists a «surplus value of gender dignity». Jónnasdóttir uses this concept to refer to the fact that men continue to control and exploit the love and the care of women without reciprocating equitably. Even in more egalitarian societies this process

of affective exploitation makes it impossible for women to reconstitute their emotional reserve and their capacity for self-esteem and authority.¹³

Universalizing the feminist cause also means placing the questions and the proposals of the diverse forms of feminism at the center of politics and public debate. We have to demonstrate the connection that exists between the claims of women and most other social questions. In this regard I consider the question of care to be central. It provides a good platform for showing how horizons are broadened and how greater objectivity is achieved when social, political, economic, and theological analysis is done from a feminist perspective.

4.3. The sense of justice and the sense of gratuity: a non-patriarchal subject

I find interesting in this regard the distinction made by Adela Cortina between *goods of justice*, which can and should be recognized as rights, and *goods of gratuity*, which cannot be demanded as rights because they cannot be satisfied by duty. Both types of goods are ingredients that are needed «for living in plenitude».¹⁴ To discover and appreciate them we need both a *sense of justice* and a *sense of gratuity*. The sense of justice impels us to give to others what corresponds to them, what they deserve as persons. This is something that humankind has been discovering in the course of history. Nowadays we understand justice to mean that all human beings have food, shelter,

clothing, education, protection in precarious times, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, and freedom also to orient their personal lives.

The sense of gratuity, on the other hand, moves us to acquire those goods of gratuity which cannot be demanded as a right and no one is obliged to give us, but which we need as much as we need the goods of justice. What are these goods? They are consolation and hope, meaning and affection. The sense of gratuity is born deep within each person; it emerges out of the «prodigious discovery that we are indissolubly *connected* [*ligados*] to one another and therefore *ob-liged* [*ob-ligados*] by what is deepest and most profound in us, even without sanctions or external command». For that reason cultivation of interiority is essential for developing the sense of gratuity. Adela Cortina expresses this beautifully: «It is in our deepest being that this enigmatic con-

nection, the secret of happiness, is discovered. From there emerges the world of obligations which cannot be demanded but can only be shared graciously; from there emerges the world of gift and donation, of consolation in times of sadness, of support in times of misfortune, of hope when the horizon becomes obscure, of meaning in the face of absurdity».

We need to fuse justice and care in both feminine and masculine subjects. We need to unite the sense of justice and the sense of gratuity, leaving behind the dichotomies and the hierarchies of the patriarchal model of subjectivity. This anthropological revolution requires new social and political structures in which to take shape, for the personal is political, as the feminism of recent decades has taught us. We need to move toward a new social contract, one that is capable of creating a society of care.

5. WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT LOVE, WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT LOVING

Feminist theologies reinterpret for today the cry of God in Genesis: *Cain, where is your sister?* They challenge us to commit ourselves seriously to the process of discerning and working for what benefits all women, for the social sciences today give incontrovertible evidence that the welfare of women redounds to the welfare of the whole community.

To speak today of justice and to preach love of neighbor without taking account of the feminization of poverty and the violence directed against women around the world is intolerable blindness. We cannot avoid speaking of the hatred and the devaluation of women that has been collectively cultivated for centuries, and often legitimized by culture and religion. In what follows we will examine some of the information which presents a challenge to our Christian humanist culture, and we will reflect on a feminist reading of the commandment, «Love your neighbor as yourself».

5.1. Cain, where is your sister?

The realities cry to heaven and contrast with the blindness or indifference of many men in the face of the claims made for greater justice by women. As I write these words, 49 women have died in Spain at the hands of their partners or ex-partners. The figure is shocking, but even more shocking are the realities of global injustice suffered by women just for being female.

The feminization of poverty is a reality which shocks anyone who views the world from the perspective of

justice. The number of girls and women who have been “disappeared” since the decade of the 1990s is more than 100 million, even though in normal circumstances 95 girls are born for every 100 boys, and girls have a significant biological advantage over boys and a lower mortality rate. These 100 million represent the difference between the women who now exist and those *would* exist if there were no discrimination and no feminization of poverty. The data on “disappeared women” speak volumes: 30 million in China, 23 million in India, 3 million in Pakistan, 1.6 million in Bangladesh, 600,000 in Egypt and Turkey, 200,000 in Nepal, and 40 million in the rest of the world.

Some 67% of the poor people in the world are women and girls. Females also represent 80% of the malnourished population, 70% of illiterate adults, and 67% of unschooled children. Although the work they do represents 52% of the total, women own only 1% of the earth’s land, they receive only 2% of agricultural credit, and they possess only 10% of the world’s wealth. As regards positions of political and economic decision-making, women hold 6% of ministerial posts and 14% of the parliamentary seats and economic management positions.

In many countries the preference for boys leads to female infanticide and selective abortion. The human development reports of the UN Development Fund reveal that there is widespread discrimination against girls as regards access to food, health, education, and other types of care. Female mortality is closely associated with the lack of

maternal health care and violence against women.

The reports of the UN Population Fund have shown that one of every three women in the world suffers physical or sexual abuse. One billion women have been beaten, forced into sexual relations, or submitted to abuse in the course of their lives. Some 47% of women reveal that their first sexual relation was forced. Over 135 million women and girls have suffered genital mutilation, and every year two million women and children are submitted to it (6,000 per day, 5 girls every minute).

Amnesty International published a report, *Human Rights, a Right of Women*, which offers some chilling statistics: «Discrimination is a mortal sickness. Every day more women and girls die as the result of different forms of gender-based violence and discrimination than from any other type of violation of human rights. Every year, according to UNICEF, more than one million girls die just by reason of being born female. Every year, due to discrimination, millions of women are mutilated, beaten, and sold in an underground slave trade for domestic or sexual purposes. Because of their sex, women run the risk of suffering various forms of violent abuse from private organizations».

The reports from UN organisms reveal that generally speaking women are much more generous with their time than men. Women do a major portion of the non-paid work in most communities. The experience of millions of women is that of living alongside men but in separate worlds. It is the experi-

ence of inequality, of difference made into subordination.

In most of the world women end up losing out just for being women. The feminization of poverty and gender discrimination have terrible consequences for women's health, their physical integrity, their access to education, and their participation in society and business.

At the present time there is a growing awareness of this reality, but the Christian world, especially the men in leadership positions, must take bold action in favor of the emancipation and liberation of the many women who are suffering from poverty, injustice, exploitation, and discrimination.

5.2. Love your neighbor as yourself

«Sister, the whole world is changing, but if you don't change, what will become of you?

Now the government helps you send your children to school, but if you do not catch the education train as it leaves, who will respect you?

Sister, I have shown you many roads, but if you don't take any of them, what more can I do?

Sister, the whole world is changing, but if you don't change, what will become of you?

Today the laws protect you; there is no superior caste or inferior caste; women have the same rights as men, but if they insult you, if they harass you, if they hit you, and you say nothing in response, who will protest for you?

Sister, the whole world is changing, but if you don't change, what will become of you?

I have explained the new rules to you, but if you don't make them known, who will tell your daughters about them?

Sisters, I am here for your sake to encourage you, but if you don't do everything you can, what more can I do?¹⁵ (Sampat Pal)

One of the obstacles preventing a revolution of gender equality to overcome discrimination against women is that many women have suffered and continue to suffer under a life project of subordination that prevents them from taking control of their lives and being free and autonomous subjects. There are "masculine" life projects (independence, sovereignty, self-direction of one's life), and there are "feminine" destinies of existence (submission, dependency, lack of access to studies and profession, greater job insecurity and exploitation, impoverishment). Often our interiorization of the patriarchal order makes us women the worst enemies of ourselves and others. For that reason the suffragist Emma Goldman was quite right when she said that the real revolution was not just being given the right to vote. The real revolution is the one that must still take place in the soul of women.

At the end of the 19th century, more than a century before Sampat Pal, and in a very different context, the Christian suffragist Elisabeth Cady Stanton edited *The Women's Bible*. Her thoughts were very similar to those of Sampat Pal, leader of the pink sari movement. «The

idea of being a helpmate to somebody else has been so sedulously drilled into most women that an individual life, aim, purpose, and ambition are never taken into consideration. They oftimes do so much in other directions that they neglect the most vital duties to themselves».¹⁶ Cady Stanton believed that women should develop courage and confidence in themselves, like the maidens in the parable of Matthew's gospel (Mt 25,1-12), so that they can look after their own affairs without needing some gentleman to come running to supply oil for their lamps. The consequences of not doing so are horrible for women: dependency, loneliness, and ignorance:

«In their ignorance, women sacrifice themselves to educate the men of their households, and to make of themselves ladders by which their husbands, brothers, and sons climb up into the kingdom of knowledge, while they themselves are shut out from all intellectual companionship, even with those they love best; such are indeed the foolish virgins. They have not kept their own lamps trimmed and burning; they have no oil in their vessels, no resources in themselves. [...] The solitude of ignorance, oh, who can measure its misery! The wise virgins are they who keep their lamps trimmed, who burn oil in their vessels for their own use, who have improved every advantage for their education, secured a healthy, happy, complete development, and entered all the profitable avenues of labor, for self-support, so that when the opportunities and the

responsibilities of life come, they may be fitted fully to enjoy the one and ably to discharge the other.»

Women need to develop self-esteem and love for themselves also in the spiritual realm. For centuries they have been considered the exiled daughters of Eve. Most women in the world have no problem fulfilling the first part of the evangelical commandment of love; they may even go too far. The real difficulties are in the second part: *...as yourself*. This is not usually a matter that concerns preachers and spiritual directors, who place great emphasis on the patriarchal sins par excellence, such as pride, ambition, desire for power, individualism, envy, and self-interest –which are, to be sure, mainly the sins of men. In this area also we all need the help of feminist spirituality.

5.3. The ways of love of self and love of neighbor

Both men and women need a feminist-based revolution in feelings in order to grow in love and make this world more livable. Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, we must discern the ways in which each of us needs to grow in order to achieve true personal and community harmony. The way of love is the way of human and spiritual maturity. Joan Chittister says that «God the Creator expects every woman to be autonomous, unique, and in constant development». Certainly, we women need to comprehend this truth, believe in it, and grow in it. We have to start from the fact that our knowledge and

experience of caring has little value in the marketplace, but we can still seek out new possibilities for growth and spiritual revelation. We know how much we have lost, and we realize how often we apparently have to start again from zero. Many times we find ourselves dispossessed and abandoned by the patriarchal order. That is why we need to discover that we also are the precious pearl, the lost drachma, the hidden treasure of God.

And how will men have to grow? For them the way of love means learning to strip down, to share power, to relinquish control, to lose the fear of not being right. They can learn much from caring. If they practice it, especially toward the women around them, they will discover that loving means welcoming and caring for others in their most ordinary, tangible aspects. The way of caring is a school of compassion. Through the praxis of caring *we feel* and *we touch* the need and the vulnerability of other human beings. And we learn to accept and affirm our own limits and our finitude with dignity, tenderness, and patience. Awareness of our shared vulnerability moves us to demand the

goods of justice for all in a non-violent but determined way.

Both men and women need to realize that love finds its source in the abundance of the heart. We cannot live a full life without love and without loving. The way of love is also the way of desire, the way of thirst for plenitude, the way of life in abundance. Those who do not follow this path will have a hard time experiencing anything more than obedience... But we are not called to be servants; we are called to be friends.

The way of love is that of self-donation beyond measure, gift beyond calculation. For us Christians, all of that is also inseparable from respect, recognition, and reciprocity. Asymmetry is a reality of life, but it is not desirable. Both mother and father want their child to grow, be autonomous, and flourish. Our God wants to introduce us into his own intimacy and wants to be received by us in our homes. He is not a solitary, autistic God, but a Trinitarian and profoundly relational one, constituted by the relations of reciprocity among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Divine *Ruah*.

6. CHRISTIAN VISIONS OF A NEW CREATION: JUSTICE, CARE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

«People don't change because of intellectual convictions or ethical inclinations, but because of transformed imaginations.»¹⁷

Madonna Kolbenschlag

Long ago Weber made us aware of the effects of an economy divorced from a non-materialist culture which can orient it toward anthropological objectives. In the north we find ourselves with material over-development and cultural and spiritual underdevelopment, whereas in many countries of the south the reverse is true. [...] We have to create spaces of encounter and dialogue in order to establish a new bond among economics, politics, and cultures. We have to face the challenge of uniting the reduction of poverty and international inequalities with ways of living that are different from those dominant in globalized capitalism. The response to the present crisis involves the re-creation of a new meta-economic, planetary wisdom. To that end we need to reactivate the religions of liberation and the moral philosophies of emancipation.»¹⁸

Feminist and eco-feminist theologies present us with a Christian vision of a new creation which combines justice with care for other persons and the Earth and which impel us toward social transformation. As in the times of the prophets, we need images and symbols that will provide us with a utopian horizon and will guide us on our continuing journey. These religious and

ethical symbols are abundant in the biblical tradition, and they need to be recreated for our times and adapted to new social contact. That is precisely the urgent task for a theology which today seeks to transform reality.

«To create is to resist, and to resist is to create», says Stéphane Hessel. We need theological and spiritual creativity in order to put content into our dreams,

to vitalize our hope, and to have direction and meaning in our lives. We are at a decisive moment in the long history of human emancipation. In the course of time a great many apparently isolated initiatives can form a critical mass which shifts the balance in favor of a majority of humanity and not just a few. As Susan George states, «I can write something or communicate to somebody an idea; I can act and inspire others so that they take action for themselves. I can be the crucial, even if insignificant, grain of sand that makes the system readjust in accord with a pattern that is at once more secure, more green, more just, more human, and more civilized. And you can also».

I would like to conclude this booklet with one of those images. In a beautiful poem, Brian Bren, a male feminist, offers us a profoundly inspiring vision of the Trinitarian God. It is an invitation for all of us to journey on the path of Wisdom as we learn from women of faith and feminists.

Who is She,
neither male nor female,
maker of all things,
only glimpsed or hinted,
source of life and gender?

She is God,
mother, sister, lover;
in her love we wake,

move and grow,
are daunted, triumph
and surrender.

Who is She,
mothering her people,
teaching them to walk,
lifting weary toddlers,
bending down to feed them?

She is Love,
crying in a stable,
teaching from a boat,
friendly with the lepers,
bound for crucifixion.

Who is She,
sparkle in the rapids,
coolness of the well,
living power of Jesus
flowing from the scriptures?

She is Life,
water, wind and laughter,
calm, yet never still,
swiftly moving Spirit,
singing in the changes.

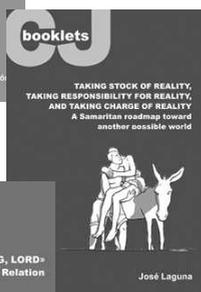
Who is She,
mother of all nature,
longing to give birth,
gasping yet
exulting to a new creation?

She is Hope,
never tired of loving,
filling all with worth.
glad of our achieving,
lifting all to freedom.¹⁹

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2. Pascal BRUCKNER, *La euforia perpetua. Sobre el deber de ser feliz*, Barcelona, Tusquets Editores, 2008, 147-148.
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4. Beverly W. HARRISON, «La fuerza de la ira en la obra del amor: Ética cristiana para mujeres y otros extraños» in Ann LOADES (Ed.), *Teología feminista*, Bilbao, Desclée de Brouwer, 1997, 275ff. The citations in this section are taken from this text.
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7. Eduardo GALEANO, *Mujeres*, Madrid, Alianza, 1995, 33-34.
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12. Victoria CAMPS, *El siglo de las mujeres*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2000, 9.
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14. Adela CORTINA, *Ética de la razón cordial. Educar en la ciudadanía en el siglo XXI*, Oviedo, Ediciones Nobel, 2007, 257. See also by the same author, *Justicia cordial*, Madrid, Trotta, 2009.
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17. Quoted in Mary Judith RESS, *Lluvia para florecer. Entrevistas sobre ecofeminismo en América Latina*, Santiago de Chile, Colectivo Con-spirando, 2002, no page number.
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