

Introduction

What changes have taken place in the so-called “feminine question” since 1995?

We see that there have been social, cultural and political victories for women in many parts of the world. Respect for their fundamental rights and dignity has notably improved, although there is still a long way to go. At the same time, however, there are some negative aspects in the dangerous ideological trends that create an unsettling confusion in the area of the identity and specific vocation of women. The radical feminism that arose during the sexual revolution of the nineteen-sixties has brought about competitiveness and tension between the sexes and promoted the view that women stand in opposition to men. Marriage and family are presented as a kind of oppressive patriarchal construct that impedes the personal growth of women. They propose to “liberate” women from maternity because they consider it to be a form of disability. Abortion, which is a tragedy, is transformed into a kind of right that must be claimed. Gender ideology has the aim of changing the very nature of human sexuality. It wants to exchange sexual identity for sexual orientation and social role. Differences between the sexes would be no more than cultural constructs and therefore an object of free choice for individuals. This ideology definitely destroys the concept of marriage and family.³

There are people who say that the feminine question seems to have lost some of its urgency and relevance.⁴

Nowadays, at least in Western countries, as there is almost full formal equality between women and men, the feminine question has less urgency and relevance in public opinion than it had in 1995⁵.

Certainly many inequalities still exist. One of these is the lack of protection for motherhood.

³ Cardinal STANISLAW. RYLKO, *Donna nella Chiesa: fondamenti antropologici e teologici*, at www.laici.va

⁴ See C. HOFF-SOMMERS, *Who stole Feminism?; Feminism is not the story of my life*; D. CRITTENDEN, *What our Mothers didn't tell us*; Amanda Bright @ home; M. TERRAGNI, *La scomparsa delle donne*.

⁵ *Giorgia Salatiello*

We can see how motherhood is not sufficiently defended and the difficulties this presents for a mother in the workplace. We know how much work women, particularly mothers, have to do in the home, something that deserves particular attention⁶.

This inadequate protection for motherhood in societies that are increasingly focused exclusively on economic gain is a form of injustice. It is present in the so-called first world countries as well as in the third world and its social and economic impact cannot be underestimated. The inclusion of women in the workplace has opened up the question of balance between the workplace and family life.

Church teaching has much to contribute by sustaining the vocation given to women. Motherhood is a vocation and fullness of life, but it does not prevent a person from contributing to society through a profession. It simply places it in second place to motherhood. However, the overall problem is not solved, because financial needs are real. It is therefore important that the Church have an active, purposeful attitude. [...] It is easily seen that human beings develop their emotional and affective world primarily in the family. The family thus becomes a priority for the state. Having more stable families reduces the bulk of social problems⁷.

Others have noted a generational difference in the way of perceiving the situation of women. While among older women the ideological feminism of the 1970's still persists, among younger women there is a desire to find new paradigms to help in their understanding of their female identity. The Church proposes its teachings as a guiding light for both. Their search is reason for hope and a call to illuminate the truth about being human, with the light of Revelation, that we are created male and female according to God's loving plan.

Many of the experts we approached agree with the view that the Beijing Conference contributed important positive elements, but that it also gave decisive impetus to a form of cultural

⁶ *Maria Voce*

⁷ *Aura Escudero*

revolution that advanced a perception of humanity that stands in stark contrast to the Christian vision.

Radical change was brought to an anthropological model that has been established for centuries and is based on an objective distinction between the sexes: man and woman. Now they have adopted sexual orientation as a criterion for classification. Such a radical change became possible as the objectivity of biological data was being set aside and first place was being given to the subjectivity expressed by freedom for self-determination regarding personal sexual drives, without any restrictions, be they biological, psychological or ethical⁸.

In the context of the Beijing Conference new concepts were put forward – gender, empowerment and reproductive rights, among others – which replaced those previously used when speaking of the advancement of the dignity of women, the man-woman relationship, family, motherhood and sexuality. This change in the language used shows that there was an attempt to change culture by making it leave behind its Judaeo-Christian provenance and by trying to create a new global culture.

Although by the end of discussions these concepts were widely criticized by representatives of participating states,⁹ these criticisms were overlooked and the concepts remained in the final documents. They were asserted with a certain amount of ambiguity that has made them become the key language used by international institutions to address women's issues. From these international fora such language has penetrated down to national and local levels across the world.

Fifteen years after Beijing, the UN "gender equality" norm and operational platform have spread globally in culture, education,

⁸ Paola Binetti

⁹ The complete report of the Beijing Conference, which includes the reservations expressed by participating states regarding the final Document (p. 154 – 176), can be found at:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf> (Last accessed 21 October 2010).

policies and laws, successfully engineering profound changes in all societies, destabilizing local values and traditions¹⁰.

Perhaps we could now conclude that the paradigms that appeared as new in 1995 and were the arbitrary impositions of a few that contradicted the norms of basic cultures, are now, fifteen years later, in a phase of consolidation and are entering more and more into ordinary people's way of thinking. We will attempt to analyze some of these new paradigms.

Rather than identify new challenges presented by the so-called feminine question, the consulted experts note that the ongoing process that began to spread internationally in Beijing is now getting worse.

Pope Benedict XVI has spoken on several occasions about the need to defend creation.¹¹ In our times, this defence includes protecting human beings from self-destruction. We need to promote a "human ecology" that will respect the order of creation in which human beings exist as either men or women. The Pope pointed out that the order of creation contains language that, if held in disdain, can destroy human beings by creating a false sense of freedom and equality. He also spoke about the role of the term 'gender' in the issue of emancipation from creation and the Creator, and he invited the whole Church to be vigilant in advancing a wholesome understanding of the human person.

This issue – safeguarding the creation of human beings, male and female – is also central in the conclusions reached by our experts after they had read the *Letter to Women* and had studied developments in the "feminine question" that had taken place in the fifteen years following the milestone in 1995. The richness of Christian anthropology needs to be promoted and shared with men and women to counter the confusion that abounds at this time.

¹⁰ Marguerite Peeters

¹¹ See for example: BENEDICT XVI, Christmas greetings to the members of the Roman Curia and Prelature, 22 December 2008; Address during the visit to the Federal Parliament in the Reichstag Building, Berlin, 22 September 2011.

