

**Safeguarding the human being, created as man
and woman**

**Fifteen years on from John Paul II's Letter to Women
and from
the 4th UN Conference on Women
(1995 – 2010)**

A Synthesis by the Women's Section – Pontifical Council for the Laity

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Premise

John Paul II wrote his Letter to Women in 1995, the year in which the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing. Blessed John Paul II did not want this important occasion to pass without the voice of the Church being heard. On numerous occasions during the year he had reflected on the dignity and vocation of women, such as in the World Day of Peace message, during the Angelus addresses and Wednesday general audiences, the Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday, his personal message to

Mrs. Gertrude Mongella, secretary general of the Fourth World Conference on Women and his address to members of the Holy See delegation attending the conference. Taken all together, these contributions make 1995 a significant milestone in the recent papal magisterium on the theme of women.

The Holy See sent its own delegation to the Beijing Conference, the last of its kind to be held. Now, fifteen years later, the legacy of that Conference, with its confused anthropological assumptions and unanswered questions, presents us with challenges that deserve closer study. Our times are seeing growing anthropological confusion and there is a great need for guidance in this area. The Church is an expert in humanity¹ and must give the world the *diakonía* of truth about human beings, male and female, and proclaim and present it as the way to true progress in the world today.

It is for this reason that the Pontifical Council for the Laity invited a group of women to reread John Paul II's *Letter to Women* and to comment, in light of current challenges, on the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. They were asked to give their opinion on the contents of the Letter that deserve greater recognition, e.g. the foundation of the dignity of man and woman, the recognition of "feminine genius", etc. Regarding the Beijing Conference, they were asked to consider its results and to examine the influence that "gender ideology" has exerted since 1995. The people we approached for this task are women who work with our Council as members or consultants and who follow issues facing the women of today from a Christian perspective.² We take this opportunity to wholeheartedly thank

¹ Cf. PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* on the development of peoples, 13; CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World*, Vatican City, 31 May 2004, 1.

² List of experts who have collaborated, in alphabetical order:

those who sent us their contributions which are certainly of great quality and depth. They all reflect a common desire to work

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Helen Alvaré, United States, university law professor, consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Laity

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Paola Binetti, Italy, expert in bioethics, member of parliament for the UDC party

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María Eugenia Cárdenas Cisneros, Mexico, university professor, coordinator of the Human Rights Centre University of Anahuac, a member of the Mexican delegation to Beijing +10 and Beijing +15

Blanca Castilla de Cortázar, Spain, PhD in theology and a member of the Royal Academy of Doctors in Spain

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Aura Escudero, Chile, member of Regnum Christi, involved in youth formation

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Katarina Hulmanova, Slovakia, member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

Karen Hurley, United States, president general of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (2006 – 2010)

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together to build a better future for the women and men of our time.

Here we give a summary of the contributions received by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in response to the consultation. The main text gathers and synthesises insights from these contributions, and some key passages are quoted in separate paragraphs. This material is intended as a tool for further reflection. It incorporates different voices that are mutually enriching, and it aims to help determine the *status quaestionis* on the vocation and mission of women in the Church and society. This is an instrument that we hope can inform lay people and pastoral workers about a topic that is important in our times. It is an open instrument because we are aware that we have consulted a limited number of women about an issue that goes beyond confessional boundaries and concerns everybody who seriously confronts the issue.

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.

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

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*

⁶ *Maria Voce*

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 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.

⁷ *Aura Escudero*

⁸ *Paola Binetti*

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, 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

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).

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.

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.

I. The *Letter to Women* from Blessed John Paul II

The Letter of John Paul II to Women was signed on 29 June 1995, published on Monday 10 July, and presented at a press conference chaired by the then-president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Cardinal Eduardo Francisco Pironio, with the participation of Giulia Paola Di Nicola of the University of Teramo and Maria Graça Sales, an official of the Pontifical Council.

This is a special document in the format of a letter addressed “directly and almost confidentially”¹² to each and every woman. In the context immediately preceding the United Nations' 4th World Conference on Women, the Pope speaks directly to women in order to engage them, to question them personally, and to invite

¹² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Angelus*, 9 July 1995.

every one of them to reflect on their personal, cultural, social and ecclesial responsibility that comes from being women.¹³

Many women wrote giving their reactions to the pope's initiative and thanking him for his words. They appreciated the novel and direct tone, and they accepted the task entrusted to them to engage directly in building society according to the characteristics of "feminine genius". Editions of *L'Osservatore Romano* in Italian subsequent to the publication of the Letter published the responses of many women and set up a sort of "ideal dialogue" between the pope and women.

The *Letter to Women* was written in continuity with the 1988 apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, incorporating and expanding its message. Both documents offer John Paul II's rich anthropological perspective.

It is in the *Letter to Women* and in *Mulieris Dignitatem* that John Paul II has expressed, perhaps more so than elsewhere, the most radical of human reality. Suffice it to recall passages of great depth in *Mulieris Dignitatem* such as the 'unity of the two' and the impressive interpretation of the passages of Genesis in which famous negations of Western tradition are superseded (n.7), or where he speaks of reciprocity as an 'evangelical novelty' (n.24)¹⁴.

This perspective has not lost its novelty, even after fifteen years, and it is an important patrimony to be offered to the people of our times as they face current challenges.

Perhaps the most salient feature of the *Letter to Women* is its positive tone, and the fact that it is full of proposals. It

¹³ "Given the urgency and complexity of issues relating to the status of women today, the Holy See delegation's contribution to the Beijing Conference is not enough for the Pope. He wants each woman to become personally involved in this work, and therefore he speaks 'directly to the hearts and minds' of each and asks them to reflect with him on themselves and their cultural, social and ecclesial responsibility that flows from their being women (cf. 1)." (EDUARDO CARD. PIRONIO, "The fate of humanity in the Third Millennium will be played out in the heart and mind of every woman", in: *L'Osservatore Romano* Italian edition, 10-11 July 1995).

¹⁴ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

proclaims rather than condemn, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the proclamation in itself has the effect of conveying that there are things to be condemned. The Pope writes a letter "directly" to women, talking to each one of them.

By emphasizing his desire to establish a direct dialogue with women – women in their concrete existential reality (mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, consecrated women, women who work...), rather than with NGOs and lobbies claiming to "represent" women – John Paul II takes an implicit but clear stance of "independence" vis-à-vis the UN. At the same time he is entering into dialogue with the institutions of global governance¹⁵.

The starting point of his dialogue is to thank each and every woman for her commitment, often silent and hidden, in defence of human beings. It is a simple act, in no way commonplace, which itself proclaims a message about the way the Church speaks to women as daughters of God and as active members of the Mystical Body of Christ. In the person of the pope, the Church speaks to women in a positive and special way, shining a penetrating light on modern dilemmas.

John Paul II recognised and acknowledged, courteously and honestly, the positive aspects and progress that can be attributed to the new awareness of the dignity of women that has taken place in recent years. He also welcomed the efforts made by UN institutions regarding the rights of women, and he called on that organization to maintain the course set by the Declaration of Human Rights.

The Letter confirmed that the Church not only has an 'appetite' for discussing questions concerning women in the Church and the world, but also a talent, a positive tone, a willingness to consider modern dilemmas, and fresh insights. Regarding tone, for example, John Paul II demonstrated "graciousness" in his reflections upon the past by not speaking of the negative aspects of some modern feminism, or its sometimes anti-Catholic stance. He preferred to emphasise its 'substantially' positive effects (n.6), the courage of

¹⁵ *Marguerite Peeters*

feminists leaders, and the Church's regret for any part played in contributing to the oppression of women. That graciousness was effective in gaining an audience for the *Letter*. The *Letter* further clarified the Church's suitability to participate in the modern dialogue about women by recalling the Church's sympathy for global institutional efforts (such as those made by the UN) for women's human rights, and its substantive agreement with the notion of rights such as those expressed in the UN Declaration on Human Rights¹⁶.

a. Biblical anthropology

As in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, in his *Letter to Women*, Pope John Paul II also included beautiful and important reflections that are based on biblical anthropology. These were to illustrate the identity and vocation of the human being, created "from the beginning" only as man and as woman.

John Paul II's interpretation, in *Mulieris Dignitatem* and in his *Letter to Women*, of the two passages of Genesis that tell of the creation of human beings, male and female, are particularly interesting. He reads them in parallel, interpreting the second in light of the first.

One pending task to be undertaken is the divulgation of John Paul II's strategy of hermeneutics in his interpretation of the two passages from Genesis about Creation. [...] They bring to light the fullness of the original beauty of Creation, the truth about the human being, male and female. I refer to both passages read together with the symbolism of the second interpreted in light of the first, as clearly expressed in *MD*, n. 5¹⁷.

Deeper study of the truth of creation leads to awareness of our identity being a gift entrusted to our freedom. This needs to be accepted and developed in the gift of ourselves to others in love. The deep anthropological truths we encounter in the story of creation are important today too, given the challenges of our

¹⁶ Helen Alvaré

¹⁷ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

times. The truth of the human being created in the image and likeness of God, created sexually differentiated, all with the same dignity, is evidenced in the first account of creation. The truth of the human being's vocational call to communion is evidenced in the second account which tells of how God decided that solitude was not "good" for the human being he had created. Hence the need to provide "adequate support". This support is not in the physical or psychological sense. It is ontological support, mutual help, mutual complementarity to achieve the fulfilment of manhood and of womanhood. The truth of creation entrusted to men and women is that their task as co-creators is entrusted to both of them.

The anthropological foundation of human dignity, and hence of women, can be found within the first pages of Genesis, specifically in the two accounts of creation that John Paul II discusses in his *Letter to Women*. [...] God entrusts man and woman with the same tasks. They are called to perpetuate the human race and transform the earth. From the beginning, then, men and women have equal responsibility in the world¹⁸.

b. Theology of the body

As part of his weekly catechesis at the Wednesday general audiences between 5 September 1979 and 28 November 1984, John Paul II offered a series of catecheses dedicated to deepening the identity and vocation of man and woman and the role of human love in God's plan. This series of catecheses has been widely studied and published with different titles: *Man and Woman He Created Them*, *Human Love in the Divine Plan*, and *The Redemption of the Body and Sacramentality of Marriage*, but perhaps the best known is *Theology of the Body*, a title used by the pope himself when he spoke about this catechesis in the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. These were over 125 catecheses

¹⁸ Nuria Calduch Benages, MN

dedicated to explaining the mystery of human beings, male and female, uniting theology, philosophy, anthropology and ethical reflection. Traces of these lessons can be glimpsed in many later documents of John Paul II's magisterium, including, *Mulieris Dignitatem* and the *Letter to Women*.

The reflections on the human being, love in God's plan and the meaning of human embodiment presented by the pope in *Theology of the Body* characteristically offer a holistic view of human beings. They show that the path to humanity's fulfilment must harmoniously integrate body, soul and spirit, according to God's divine plan.

His proposal recovers the biblical idea that the image of God in the human being is also reflected in the body, understood as “an expression of the person”, and expressed in his or her masculinity and femininity in a “spousal meaning”. By taking the body as a starting point, John Paul II aims to identify the spousal structure of the human person. This leads to the discovery that the fullness of God's image is not so much in people as individuals, but rather in the “communion of persons”¹⁹.

As John Paul II was studying the theology of the body, he made it clear that the Christian faith is an incarnated faith. It has nothing to do with spiritualism or Manichaeism of which it is often accused by those who are unfamiliar with it. Christian faith is a faith that has a positive view of the human body and integrates it within God's plan for the happiness of human beings.

Some of the experts have proposed the wider diffusion of the teachings of the *Theology of the Body* in order to make the wealth of Christian anthropology better known. It offers a vision that responds to the longing of every human being for fulfilment in love, and it presents a challenge to the reductionism of gender ideology. This corpus of teaching helps penetrate the mystery of what it means to be a man or woman, to understand the link between the identity and vocation of human beings and the

¹⁹ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

biological fact of their male or female corporeality, and it helps to better understand the logic of the gift by which every human being is called to self-fulfilment.

John Paul II uses the same arguments being used by those he intends to criticize. He is looking for dialogue above all else. To those who champion the sexual revolution he makes an even bolder proposal. He raises the issue of body as a privileged field of gift and communication, as a place where *Eros* and *Ethos* meet. However, he stresses that the body has its own laws and principles that are intrinsic to its very nature²⁰.

The vision that emerges from Pope John Paul II's teachings is far from being a biological fact that reduces the mystery of human beings to their physical embodiment. It is a vision that helps us understand the fact that human beings are always born male or female.

The corporeality of human beings, with all the aspects that characterize the natural dynamism and the imprint of their instincts and impulses, may become one of the most interesting ways to counter "gender ideology". The undeniable dimension of human sexuality, with a specific physical form, is largely determined by genes, chromosomes, hormones and subsequently by all other aspects of characterological and educational aspects that unequivocally sculpt it. Being a man or woman, is not so much what I feel, but what I am and that a thousand signs and symptoms of my body tell me and suggest to me from day to day²¹.

In a world like ours that is invaded by concepts that reduce sexuality to a mere object of pleasure, humanity is in need of the treasure trove of teachings in the Church that speak of the dignity and worth of human sexuality within God's plan.

c. The uni-duality of man and woman

In recent times, reflections on "women" have perhaps become characterised by a growing interest in certain circles to avoid

²⁰ Paola Binetti

²¹ Paola Binetti

limiting these discussions to the identity and vocation of women by inserting them within reflections on the identity of men and women and the meaning of the relationship between both. Arguably, this development marks the transition to a next stage which is, after the period of claims and demands has passed, to face the strong contemporary cultural problems in male and female identity. This requires us to focus our reflections on the question of identity, the specificity of each one and the inter-relationship between both.

From the cultural point of view, people are slowly becoming aware that the campaigns focussing on women should be reformulated according to the male-female relationship. This is because the freedom of both depends on the freedom of the other. It is also because the role of males is essential for effective equality, one that is based on appreciation of their respective talents in joint responsibility in the family and home, in active cooperation with social partners, civil society and the private sector²².

The concept of uni-duality in the *Letter to Women* expresses this mutual relationship. It refers to the fact that God confides to the unity of the two, man and woman, not just the task of procreation, but the very construction of history. The richness of this concept of uni-duality is in the fact that it not only saves the essential human equality of men and women, but also expresses the richness of their difference and of the relationship that is based on this difference.

This concept can allow us to overcome, both in terms of theoretical reflection and existential concreteness, the extremism found on both sides. These are denounced in no.8, as 'static and undifferentiated equality' or 'irreconcilable and inexorably conflictual difference'. [...] The Letter outlines (especially nos.7 and 8) a very clear and precise anthropology that does not sacrifice the essential human equality of man and woman, nor the richness of difference and the relationship that is based on it²³.

²² Giulia Paola di Nicola

²³ Giorgia Salatiello

The concept of uni-duality is eminently relational. It refers to the mutual help between a man and a woman, and this is not limited to the sphere of action. It belongs above all to the sphere of being.

From this he concludes that male and female “are complementary not only biologically and psychologically, but above all from the ontological point of view” (no.8). [...] These claims are like “gold doubloons”, which have not yet been fathomed either in theory or in practice²⁴.

The concept of uni-duality is linked to other concepts that appear in John Paul II's documents such as reciprocity, mutual complementarity and mutual responsibility for each other received as a "gift". In the context of the family, the first area of mutual cooperation, the uni-duality can be perceived in the fact that fatherhood and motherhood are necessary, and depend on each other.

Its most profound dimension is seen in responsible reciprocity, in so far as woman has been gifted to man who from the beginning was entrusted to her. That means that she is his responsibility as he is her responsibility. Therefore, not only does paternity depend on maternity, but maternity is entrusted to paternity. Maternity is a task of paternity²⁵.

However, this first area of collaboration is not the only one. Mutual collaboration also benefits social, economic, political and ecclesial life. Uni-duality helps us to understand that the family and culture both form part of the common mission of men and women, and they require the specific contribution that each can give and the relations of communion between them.

The relationship between family and work, and the conviction that the contribution of woman and man together is necessary in every field, is a message that needs to be developed. We need a culture with a mother and a family with a father. This *Letter*, more than any other writings, emphasises the importance of the contribution of women in

²⁴ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

²⁵ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

professional work and world governance. Fortunately, this truth, contained in Genesis, has been rediscovered in twentieth century society [...]. In order to properly settle this shared view of the world and family we need to delve deeper into the meaning of fatherhood, which is the only effective defence that can save motherhood. [...] Moreover, fatherhood – to love and provide for the good of others in a way that pertains to men – must be exercised within their families and towards their wives in a special way, and also in the public sphere where they must advocate in favour of motherhood, a woman’s way of loving, also in the professional and cultural field. [...] If we persist in insisting on the incorporation of women into a work environment that does not allow for dedication to family, we prevent them from making their unique humanising contribution to the shaping of society. Responsibility for this does not only depend on women, but also on those who accept their work only if they work in the same way as they do. The contribution of women – giving life and humanizing the world – is necessary in order to maintain the family and to ensure that work is not only compatible but that it is in the service of the family and the individual. [...] the unitary vision of the family and of governance of creation has yet to be properly assimilated and developed²⁶.

The difference between men and women is ontological. It is not a cultural creation nor mere nature. It is a relational difference that requires personal categories in order to be explained. Pope John Paul II’s descriptions of this co-existence of man and woman as being-with or being-for shows the use of philosophical categories of a personal matrix that can express the reality of the relationship. Men and women are persons, but they are distinguished by a different relationship that is constitutively intrinsic to the person of each.

Personalist anthropology states that nature is to be distinguished from the person, just as Thomist philosophy sees a real difference between the essence and act of being. If you read these two distinctions together, sexual difference could be found in the binomial that is relatively opposite to nature or essence, that is to say, the person or act of being. The proposal underlying the statements of Pope John Paul II allows us to glimpse how this relatedness is inscribed in our very

²⁶ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

being as an act, namely, the person. Our substance is not incompatible with being relational, as pointed out by those who have described it as co-existence, or as BEING-WITH or BEING-FOR. We can deduce from this that the relationship that places men and women face to face, implies for each a different ontological relationship which affects or transversely conditions the whole nature – body and soul – of each. It is as if we were to say that they are two different people, not because each individual is unique and unrepeatable, but because of a different relationship – derived from the source – constitutive and intrinsic to the person of each one²⁷.

Men and women are equal with a "non static or non uniform" equality and are different in a way that is not "irreconcilable and inexorably conflictual". They are one for the other in a manner that is non-equal in either sense.

If equality is reflected in reciprocity, the difference that must be safeguarded allows for the complementarity of a particular mutual 'help'. This help is not identical in both directions, but each one says and needs, from himself or herself, the other²⁸.

Yet in some contexts disquiet in highlighting the difference between men and women still persists. This is not only for fear that this will deprive women of access to roles considered traditionally male, but also because the current culture that attempts to normalise different types of "families" (single parents or same-sex couples) sees complementarity as an anthropologically dispensable accessory.

The Letter robustly proposes complementarity (nos. 7 & 8), yet the notion is under quite specific attack in the United States. It is overtly demeaned by scholars in many fields and regarded as a tool serving women's regression. Its neurobiological, psychological, evolutionary and philosophical bases are sharply contested, even while it is agreed that there has been little research done on complementarity in these areas because it is inherently difficult to study²⁹.

²⁷ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

²⁸ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

²⁹ Helen Alvaré

There is also a prevalence of "gender distrust" among some women towards men, a tendency to try to replace them instead of working on complementarity and cooperation with them.

A strong element of the anti-complementarity campaign relies upon 'gender-mistrust' of males. It includes a strategy to 'replace' men – in jobs, and even in parenting – with either other women (lesbian relationships), the state (welfare funding) or some combination of private corporate policies (flex-time, maternity benefits and leave, 'mommy track' schedules) and personal resources (friends, grandmothers, personal savings). This directly contrasts with the idea of 'collaboration' – of working synergistically with men in a variety of spheres – so wonderfully presented in the *Letter* and in *On the Collaboration of Men and Women*. The decline of marriage and the precipitous rise of single motherhood are the fruits of this thinking. More attention to the existence and the good of complementarity – in theological, philosophical and various scientific inquiries – is desperately required³⁰.

The personalistic categories used by John Paul II can help overcome resistance to these relational concepts of complementarity, reciprocity, uni-duality.

I think [that resistance to the idea of reciprocal complementarity] stems from two reasons. The first concern is to distance themselves from the myth of the androgyne, for which one single being is divided into two, and each sex is only that half of the whole. There are good reasons for such denial, because from a personalist perspective it is clearly perceived that every person has value in him/herself. The second reason for this difficulty comes from the idea that marriage requires complementarity, which makes the interpretation of celibacy for the 'Kingdom of Heaven' difficult, a vocation revealed by the Messiah and that continues to arise spontaneously in Christian families, in imitation of the same Jesus Christ. But Pope John Paul II, and all the magisterium, has no qualms talking about complementarity. In fact, reading carefully you notice that he solved both problems. His approach is not only very far away from the idea of the androgyne, but it is the opposite. In fact, he does not neglect to point out that 'in principle' God created TWO so they may be ONE, which is the

³⁰ Helen Alvaré

opposite movement from that of the myth. As for celibacy, the Pope knows that marriage is the first dimension of complementarity, but not the only one. Man and woman need each other in other areas such as work, culture and other joint projects, as well as within the family and the Church. In the sharing of a project, relationships can be complementary at different levels of intimacy and respect the commitments that each has in his/her own state of life³¹.

John Paul II does not use these concepts in isolation. On the contrary, he specifically points out that complementarity is mutual.

In many passages he warns that marriage is the first but not the only dimension of complementarity which is present in the mundane realities of government and the creation of culture and, of course, in carrying out the mission of the Church. In other words, reciprocity, complementarity and mutual complementarity are truths which demand to be studied in depth and to be understood. It is an important task for the development of human thought³².

We are entrusted with the task of deepening our reflections on this important concept of uni-duality in order to propose the mutual man-woman complementarity as an anthropological treasure to be safeguarded in our time.

d. The feminine genius

As in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, in the *Letter to Women* John Paul II speaks of the "feminine genius". He calls for it to become more visible so that society will be more humane, more respectful of the dignity and vocation of each person, and more to the measure of the human being.

Adding to the idea of complementarity, the idea of feminine genius serves to highlight the specificity of women and their particular vocation in the Church and society. Our Lady is the highest expression of "feminine genius". She is the prototype for

³¹ Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

³² Blanca Castilla de Cortázar

all human beings, men and women, but is especially so for women. We need to look at Our Lady when thinking about the question of women. We can be inspired by her to discover the richness of the feminine genius, the vocation to being custodians of human beings in a particular way, and to safeguard the meaning of love.

In full harmony with the magisterium, Chiara Lubich taught us to see Our Lady as 'the' answer to women. Mary's greatness is love. Women, therefore, are called today more than ever to develop the greatest of gifts, love, in the Church following the example of Mary. If women do not look to Mary, she affirmed in 1991, then they 'have lost all possibilities.' With this vocation to save love, women can make a contribution to the flowering of the 'Marian profile' of the Church, following the example of Mary who gave life to Jesus, to Jesus in us, Jesus in our midst³³.

Perhaps a particularly appropriate term to express the characteristic of this "genius" of women can be found in the expression "the immense availability of women to spend themselves in human relationships" (*Letter no.9*). This dimension is certainly not alien to men, since every human being is called to self-surrender in love, but women know how to bring this dimension to the fore in a particular way. This is undoubtedly an important part of the wealth they bring, something of which humanity is very much in need.

It is important to promote understanding and appreciation of the "feminine genius" as a particular vocation to serve God, the Church and society. It is an offering of oneself as a gift to others in order to serve as a contrast to an individualistic and exploitative mentality, and to live spiritual motherhood as a dimension proper to women's commitment and service to others.

However, there is still some lack of understanding of the fact that the real expression of 'genius' includes service to God, to the Church, and to society. Women are called to offer the gift of self and to be present for others in ways which contradict the individualistic

³³ *Maria Voce*

mentality that seeks self-gratification at the expense of others. Acts of Christian charity recall the tender care given by Jesus to each one in need of His healing touch. The attributes of nurturing and encouraging are examples of the well-lived vocation of 'spiritual motherhood' to which all women are called no matter whether they are married, single or vowed religious³⁴.

In addition, the "feminine genius" can be a valuable category for conceptualizing the contributions that women as women make to society. It could encourage a greater contribution from this female resource in those areas of public life in which women are present – and in which sometimes, regrettably, they have adapted to male models rather than contribute the wealth that is particular to women.

There has been far more conversation, in both Catholic and secular circles, about women's particular contributions toward the spousal and parenting enterprises. But the notion that women's gifts can be made visible wherever women assume roles permeates the *Letter*. Even if it might be observed that these gifts are *de facto* offered by women today, there is a dearth of reflection upon them. This is likely one result of a fear of 'upsetting' the gains women have achieved in non-domestic spheres. Pointing up sex differences is apparently still considered a dangerous gambit. This reticence is potentially problematic for two reasons. The first is that it easily leads to women failing to deploy – and society failing consciously to value – feminine gifts. Secondly, it may lead to a concomitant unwillingness to acknowledge women's gifts even in the sphere in which woman's unique identity is most irreplaceable – the familial sphere³⁵.

The call for women to contribute their specific attributes to the building of a more humane culture is recurrent throughout the *Letter*. The Holy Father recognises that women have a special vocation. He asks them to engage in resisting the market logic that focuses only on economic gain and uses the logic of competition, and to offer a logic of solidarity and caring relationships that will create a more humane society.

³⁴ Karen Hurley

³⁵ Helen Alvaré

[In the *Letter*] there is a call made to the genius of women. It calls for due appreciation of female qualities (but that are not inaccessible to men) that alone seem capable of going beyond the kind of organisation that is founded solely on the logic of profit and economic success. Taking this call seriously could bring about the development of an original project by Catholic women and men aimed towards integral human progress in which the contribution of women is essential in articulating a general proposal, one that adheres to the truth of the human being³⁶.

If women are part of the structures and contribute this element that is so specific to them, and if they do not give in or adapt it to a utilitarian model, then they will find channels of expression for their creative affectivity that will be for the benefit of human beings.

John Paul II looked at our market-oriented logic that focuses only on profit, a logic that creates a degree of competitiveness that leads to conflict, and he proposed that we replace it with a logic of solidarity in which the care ethic will characterise all human relationships. The humanization of our society depends on greater involvement by women in the basic structures on which society is built. They can make a unique and effective contribution in dealing with major issues such as large-scale migration and the serious pollution of the material and cultural environment that is taking place. At the same time they safeguard life in all its fragility by caring for the terminally ill, for those who no longer want to live, for drug addicts, for the lonely and the elderly etc. The pope sees a feminine presence caring for needs in all of these areas with typically feminine creativity³⁷.

In the fifteen years since the publication of the *Letter to Women* much has been done to cultivate appreciation of the "feminine genius", but much more still needs to be done. Above all, women themselves need to be more aware of this particular vocation and to live it out more fully.

It seems fitting that the discourse on 'feminine genius', which finds ultimate expression in *Our Lady*, so well expressed during the pontificate of John Paul II and taken up several times by Benedict

³⁶ *Giorgia Salatiello*

³⁷ *Paola Binetti*

XVI, be given further attention. Women must make greater efforts to reflect the elevated reality described in the *Letter*, to know how to accept this gift, and to be other Marys in our time. There is also a need for greater acceptance of this message by men too³⁸.

To really understand this concept in all of its richness, we need to understand that it must go hand in hand with the concept of uni-duality and complementarity of gifts with men.

Feminine genius must always be considered from the perspective of a mutual relationship, one that can combine attention to the female specific with that of the male so that there is full appreciation of the gifts that both can make available to the entire community. We also need to emphasise the close relationship between the issue of feminine genius and all the issues associated with the commitment of laity, men and women, in the life of the Church in collaboration with priests³⁹.

Cardinal Eduardo Pironio said in his presentation of the *Letter to Women*:

But it is not only in social and political life that the Pope wants to see more space given to the feminine genius. Its specific vocation, 'prophecy' contained within femininity must keep improving the life of the Church. For this, however, women must live in a conscious loyalty to the 'difference' of their femininity and of their particular mission compared to those of men. To understand this imperative, however, there is a need to distance ourselves 'from the canons of functionality typical in human societies'. To start from the 'specific criteria of the sacramental economy, that is, from that economy of 'signs' which God freely chooses to render himself present among humanity.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Maria Voce*

³⁹ *Giorgia Salatiello*

⁴⁰ CARDINAL EDUARDO PIRONIO, *cit.*, 4

II. The 4th United Nations World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995

1. Context of the Conference

The 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in early September 1995, took place amid high expectations because it was a huge international event taking place in China, a country hitherto known for its isolation from the rest of the world. The attitude of the great nation of China towards the rest of the world was beginning to show signs of a certain openness while its economy revealed signs of rapid growth. The Chinese government granted thousands of visas to participants, journalists, observers and members of NGOs who participated in a parallel event held in Huairou, 55 km from Beijing.

The 4th Conference took place in a rather particular global political context. In 1995 only a few years had passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, a context which opened up new challenges and new opportunities. No longer under the constant threat of global conflict, an era of new and improved international relations had begun, in an international non-confrontational context. This helped create a positive climate so that the conference could be an opportunity for women to become more aware of their dignity. On a positive note, in the vast majority of countries, women already had equality before the law, opportunities for participation in public, economic and political life and access to education. The Conference provided a wonderful opportunity to assess the fruit of this positive global change. Perhaps another factor to be considered in the context of the Conference was the emergence and spread of the internet which favoured the creation of networks between different countries. They could now count on a more immediate form of communication than before.

It is also important to mention as part of the context the other United Nations global conferences that took place in the 90's. The language they used was notably similar to that used in Beijing. This shows that Beijing was not an isolated event: a common language corresponds to a common stance. The conferences to which we refer are: the Conference on Education for All in Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990, the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, and the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. The last of these had significant similarities in language and ideas with Beijing.

The Holy See, as already mentioned, sent its own delegation to the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, led by US Professor Mary Ann Glendon, with two Monsignors as deputies, thirteen women and seven men.⁴¹ The delegation worked tirelessly before and during the Conference to make the voice of the Holy See heard. It vigorously called for the promotion of the dignity of women, while highlighting the presence of ideologies that undermined this promotion. Many countries found the presence of the Holy See to be helpful. The clarifications that the delegation offered on many occasions helped to avoid positions being naively taken.

One of the main experiences that we had as members of the Holy See delegation to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was the powerful realisation that nothing was improvised. Already during our preparation for the event, in our study of the documents and

⁴¹ Names of the Holy See delegation to the 4th World Conference on Women: Prof. Mary Ann Glendon, head of delegation. Most Rev. Renato R. Martino, titular Archbishop of Segarime, deputy-head of delegation. Msgr. Diarmuid Martin, deputy head of delegation. Delegation members: Msgr. Frank Dewane, Ms Patricia Donahoe, Ms Teresa EE Chooi, Msgr. Peter J. Elliot, Ms Pilar Escudero de Jensen, Ms Janne Haaland Matlary, Ms Claudette Habesch, Ms Kathryn Hawa Hoomkwap, Mr John Klink, Ms Irena Kowalska, Ms Joan Lewis, Msgr. David John Malloy, Dr Joaquín Navarro-Valls, Sr Anne Nguyen Thi Thanh, Ms Gail Quinn, Mr Luis Jensen Acuña, Ms Sheri Rickert, Ms Lucienne Sallé, Ms Kung Si Mi. Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano* Italian edition, 26 August 1995, p.1.

attempts to understand which groups, organizations and institutions sustained it, it became clear that Beijing was in a sense, the summit of decades of work, carried out consciously and seriously through networks with "missionary awareness" for the cause it aimed to defend and propagate. This finding was reflected in presentations and discussions, and was clearly expressed in the final document, the Platform for Action. As we began to study these issues we discovered that the language used was not there by chance. It included terms such as empowerment, sexual and reproductive health, sexual orientation, etc. that had a background and meaning in English that was difficult to grasp as a concept in other languages⁴².

During the conference there was intense and active pro-abortion, pro-choice and pro-homosexuality lobbying. The Holy See Delegation, in line with a broad group of countries and international leaders,⁴³ focused its efforts on highlighting the contradiction of this mentality with the solemn "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" of 1948. There was widespread concern because the Beijing conference had no authority to question the human rights tradition.⁴⁴

⁴² *Pilar Escudero de Jensen*

⁴³ "Really clear words [those of Queen Fabiola of Belgium in defence of the family as the cornerstone of society], but which many here would have preferred not to have heard. The preparatory documents were silent on the subject of family, and the draft Platform for Action that has to be adopted in Beijing puts into brackets the concept of family as the 'fundamental cell of society'. This is in total contrast with the solemn *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (16.3). We know that brackets in the language of United Nations Conferences tell us that there is no agreement on those points. The Beijing Conference must also clarify whether the Declaration of fifty years ago still has some value for humanity today and in the future". (CARLO DE LUCIA, "A discourse of fundamental value: the intervention of Prof. Mary Ann Glendon, head of the Holy See Delegation" in: *L'Osservatore Romano* Italian edition, 6 September 1995).

⁴⁴ "'Participants at the Beijing Conference do not have the authority to undermine the pillars of the human rights tradition', the Holy See Delegation clearly reaffirmed in a statement issued on Saturday morning by spokesman Navarro-Valls..." (CARLO DE LUCIA, "Do not undermine the pillars of the human rights tradition: declaration of the Holy See Delegation at the Fourth World Conference

Some of the topics in which differences can be found between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the proposals discussed at the 4th Beijing Conference are: the lack of reference to the recognition of human dignity being the foundation of freedom, justice and peace; the omission of marriage as a fundamental right and the concept of family as the cornerstone of society – in Beijing marriage and family were considered in a negative way, being seen rather as an impediment to the fulfilment of women and associated with violence; references to motherhood were marginal or negative in nature – the words mother and motherhood were considered reductive with respect to the full dignity of women, while in 1948 every mother and child was entitled to special care and protection.⁴⁵ Another cause of concern was the tendency to consider women's health problems primarily as problems related to sexuality and "reproduction". There was no attention given to other serious female health problems associated with poverty such as malnutrition, poor access to drinking water, and the precariousness with which many women are forced to approach pregnancy and motherhood. On the other hand, there was condemnation of the absence of any mention of the suffering caused, especially to women, by a growing culture of sexual permissiveness.⁴⁶ This lack of balance in the way enormous

on Women in Beijing”, in: *L'Osservatore Romano* Italian edition, 10 September 1995, p.1 and 5)

⁴⁵ Cf. CARLO DE LUCIA, cit., p.1 and 5.

⁴⁶ “... the Holy See has expressed its concern regarding a tendency to focus privileged attention and resources on the consideration of health problems related to sexuality, whereas a comprehensive approach to the health of all women would have to place greater emphasis on such questions as poor nutrition, unsafe water and those diseases that afflict millions of women each year, taking a vast toll on mothers and children. The Holy See concurs with the Platform for Action in dealing with questions of sexuality and reproduction where it affirms that changes in the attitudes of both men and women are necessary conditions for achieving equality and that responsibility in sexual matters belongs to both men and women. Women are, moreover, most often the victims of irresponsible sexual behaviour, in terms of personal suffering, of disease, poverty and the deterioration of family life.

emphasis was placed on certain women's problems while completely brushing aside others, no less serious or real, clearly revealed the existence of underlying agendas, thus explaining this unilateral selection. Moreover, attempts were made to remove all reference to religion except when associated with intolerance and extremism. This was in complete contrast with 1948 where the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion was recognised.

During the Conference, partly due to the vigorous efforts of the Holy See Delegation, there was a toning down of the attitude that put into question the issue of the human rights tradition.⁴⁷

The 4th Conference produced two documents: the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration. The Platform for Action contains a list of the main problems facing women, many of which are very real and demand a response.⁴⁸ Many of the concrete

The Conference document, in the view of my Delegation, is not bold enough in acknowledging the threat to women's health arising from widespread attitudes of sexual permissiveness. The document likewise refrains from challenging societies which have abdicated their responsibility to attempt to change, at their very roots, irresponsible attitudes and behaviour." (MARY ANN GLENDON, Intervention at the 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing, 5 September 1995, in: *L'Osservatore Romano* Italian edition, 6 September 1995, 7).

⁴⁷ "The clear position adopted Saturday by the Holy See Delegation was not only useful, but 'appropriate and necessary'... not only are discussions moving at a faster pace, but the contents of the European Union's position has substantially changed. Religion in the final document will be re-introduced in one paragraph the text of which is being finalised. The rights and responsibilities of parents will become an issue that will be of central concern to Europe. As for the family, it has finally been agreed to confirm and reaffirm the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* according to which it is "the fundamental cell of society". (CARLO DE LUCIA, "Developing countries should not be hostages to foreign debt. Discussions at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing", in: *L'Osservatore Romano* Italian edition, 11-12 September 1995, p.10).

⁴⁸ "The heart of the Program for Action consists of many provisions that are consonant with Catholic teachings on dignity, freedom, and social justice: those dealing with the needs of women in poverty; with strategies for development, literacy, and education; for ending violence against women; for building a culture

objectives raised here are still valid, can be shared and should be protected with commitment at a local, national and international level.

Twelve of these areas were correctly identified and demand particular attention. They are poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflict, the economy, decision making, the lack of institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, the environment, and finally the need to pay special attention to girl children. For each of these areas specific targets were set⁴⁹.

However, the final document of the 4th Conference contained ambiguities in the terminology used that gave rise to interpretations that were ideologically imbued. Perhaps the hypothesis could be advanced that, in view of the differences of opinion regarding the implementation of a vision of the world and humanity that conflicted with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this ambiguous terminology was adopted to leave open the possibility for action. The consequences of this have emerged in the last fifteen years: the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has made way for an interpretation that is anti-life, anti-family, anti-women's priorities and has forged ahead with its proposed change of cultural paradigms.

The aforementioned ambiguity gives rise to the questioning of cultural values such as human and family life, and the mutual man-woman complementarity. These are values that are needed as a basis for any reflection on the dignity and vocation of women.

of peace; and with providing access for women to employment, land, capital, and technology. Other worthwhile provisions concerned the connection between the feminization of poverty and family disintegration, the relation of environmental degradation to scandalous patterns of production and consumption, the discrimination against women that begins with abortion of female fetuses, the promotion of partnership and mutual respect between men and women, and the need for reform of the international economic order.” (MARY ANN GLENDON, “What happened at Beijing”, in: *First Things* 59, January 1996: 30-36.)

⁴⁹ Paola Binetti

There is no doubt that some essential points of our culture and tradition were questioned at Beijing. It is worth pointing out once more that these points are non-negotiable values which we know well⁵⁰.

In the final document, the language used to promote sexual rights was partially contained. However, the end result is far from satisfactory.⁵¹

Major issues such as dignity, male and female identity, sexuality as a language of personal love, pre-marital relationships and marriage, motherhood and fatherhood are absent in the Platform and post Beijing policies. Others such as parity, equal opportunities, overcoming poverty, maternal health, women heads of household, education ... etc. are present with an ideological bias⁵².

The Holy See Delegation decided to sign the document with various reservations that were presented to the General Assembly and were included, along with the reservations of many countries, in the final report.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Paola Binetti*

⁵¹ “As at Cairo, the Holy See was concerned that language on sexual and reproductive ‘health’ would be used to promote the quick-fix approach to getting rid of poverty by getting rid of poor people. Much of the foundation money that swirled around the Beijing process was aimed at forging a link between development aid and programs that pressure women into abortion, sterilization, and use of risky contraceptive methods. That point has also troubled distinguished non-Catholic observers.” (MARY ANN GLENDON, cit.).

⁵² *Pilar Escudero de Jensen*

⁵³ “The Holy See’s position as the conference came to an end was thus a difficult one. The documents had been improved in some respects. But in other ways they were even more disappointing than the Cairo document, which the Holy See had been able to join only partially and with many formal reservations. [...] the Holy See delegation associated itself in part, with several reservations, with the conference documents. As at Cairo, it reaffirmed its well-known positions on abortion and family planning methods. It could not accept the health section at all. [...] In keeping with the Holy Father’s instruction to vigorously reject what was unacceptable, my concluding statement on behalf of the Holy See was sharply critical of the conference documents for the remaining deficiencies that our delegation had tried from the beginning to publicize and remedy.” (MARY ANN GLENDON, cit.)

Significantly, the *L'Osservatore Romano* correspondent in Beijing, in the final days of the conference, lamented the focus on battling the feminist ideologies held by dominant economic forces and the missed opportunity for real development and progress in the topics concerning the dignity of women.⁵⁴

2. *The outcome of the Beijing Conference*

Fifteen years on, the outcome cannot be described as completely positive. The 4th Conference succeeded in making a sharp analysis of the situation of women but many of the positive ideas proposed in documents, due to a lack of political will, remained as words written on paper.

... and instead the most negative part relating to gender and abortion has been spreading. Life and family received a severe blow in Beijing from a fiercely strong cultural minority and from a majority of women who are often unable to grasp the full disruptive force of those proposals, the use of those terms and the constant repetitive manipulation of the language⁵⁵.

“The Holy See wishes to associate itself with the consensus only on those above-mentioned aspects of the Documents that the Holy See consider to be positive and at the service of the real well-being of women... numerous points in the Documents are incompatible with what the Holy See and other countries deem favourable to the true advancement of women.” (“Holy See gives partial consent to Beijing Documents”, in: *L'Osservatore Romano* Italian edition, 16 September 1995, p.1)

See the reference in note 4 for a complete list of reservations expressed by participating states.

⁵⁴ “Perhaps the Beijing Conference will be remembered as a great missed opportunity. The battle to stop the feminisms supported by the dominant economic forces prevented clearer agreements being made on the issues of the dignity of women, and also on the resources needed for their true development and progress which would doubtlessly be the same as those needed for the development and progress of society.” (CARLO DE LUCIA, “Conclusion of the Fourth World Conference on Women”, in: *L'Osservatore Romano* Italian edition, 16 September 1995, p.15)

⁵⁵ Paola Binetti

While many financial and human resources have been directed towards the implementation of the "gender perspective" and "reproductive rights", other areas that were key to the true advancement of women have not been given the same importance.

I see a disproportion in efforts [...]. Education, health, equal employment opportunities, protection of the family and motherhood are frequently mentioned, but in practice they are not priorities⁵⁶.

The creation of new international rights remains problematic,⁵⁷ as does the question regarding the authority by which it was done in Beijing. Issues remain unresolved regarding the cooperation of society with the challenges facing women today as they try to combine their full participation in public, social and economic life with their role in family life.⁵⁸ The ideology that has imbued the

⁵⁶ *Pilar Escudero de Jensen*

⁵⁷ "The Holy See has been following with great interest the commemoration of Beijing +10. We are pleased with the progress made in particular areas and are happy to support the great advances achieved by women and for women since Beijing. At the same time, we recognize there is much to be done and many new challenges on the horizon that threaten the progress made in favor of women and girls. The Holy See shares the concerns of other delegations about efforts to represent the outcome documents of Beijing and Beijing + 5 as creating new international rights. My Delegation concurs that there was no intent on the part of states to create such rights. Moreover, any attempt to do so would go beyond the scope of the authority of this Commission. With respect to the recently adopted declaration, the Holy See would have preferred a clearer statement emphasizing that the Beijing documents cannot be interpreted as creating new human rights, including a right to abortion." (MARY ANN GLENDON, *Intervention at the 49th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women*, New York, 7 March 2005.)

⁵⁸ "The problem of harmonizing women's aspirations for fuller participation in social and economic life with their roles in family life is one that women themselves are fully capable of resolving. But the problem will not be resolved without certain major, one may even say radical, changes in society. In the first place, policy makers must attend more closely to women's own accounts of what is important to them, rather than to special interest groups that purport to speak for women but often do not have women's interests at heart. Secondly, care-giving, paid or unpaid, must receive the respect it deserves as one of the most important forms of human work. And thirdly, paid labor must be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their security and advancement at the expense

concept of gender equality has become more evident over the years and has resulted in limiting the true advancement of women. When the specificity and mutual complementarity between man and woman becomes dissolved, it does poor service to the cause of women.⁵⁹

Moreover, the question remains regarding the role of such meetings in the formation of the culture of our time, a place where minority views are gaining ground and legitimacy to the point of filling the moral and cultural void left by the crisis in Christian culture.⁶⁰ The question also arises in a society capable of an excellent examination of conscience but unable to produce

of the roles in which many millions of them find their deepest fulfillment. (*Laborem Exercens*, No.19.) In sum, the problem will not be solved until human values take precedence over economic values.” (MARY ANN GLENDON, cit.)

⁵⁹ “Achieving equality between women and men in education, employment, legal protection and social and political rights is considered in the context of gender equality. Yet the evidence shows that the handling of this concept, as hinted at in the Cairo and Beijing Conferences, and subsequently developed in various international circles, is proving increasingly ideologically driven, and actually delays the true advancement of women. Moreover, in recent official documents there are interpretations of gender that dissolve every specificity and complementarity between men and women. These theories will not change the nature of things but certainly are already blurring and hindering any serious and timely advancement in the recognition of the inherent dignity and rights of women.” (Most Rev. CELESTINO MIGLIORE, *Address as Permanent Observer of the Holy See at 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women regarding a 15 year review of the Beijing Conference*, <http://www.zenit.org/article-28578?l=english>, last accessed on 11 August 2010).

⁶⁰ “The most important political lesson to be taken from the Beijing conference is that huge international conferences are not suitable settings for addressing complex questions of social and economic justice or grave issues of human rights. Unfortunately, there is an increasing tendency for advocates of causes that have failed to win acceptance through ordinary democratic processes to resort to the international arena, far removed (they hope) from scrutiny and accountability. The sexual libertarians, old-line feminists, and coercive population controllers can be expected to keep on trying to insert their least popular ideas into UN documents for unveiling at home as ‘international norms’.” (MARY ANN GLENDON, *What happened at Beijing*, cit.)

concrete results to solve the problems that have been so brilliantly analysed. Is there not a risk of producing an opposite effect, by depriving words of all meaning when they do not produce the desired effect, and by increasingly undermining confidence in political authority?⁶¹

Over the course of the past fifteen years, other events have entered the picture that have made it more complex. We will briefly mention some of them. In the year 2000, the 192 member states of the United Nations agreed on the Millennium Development Goals set to be achieved by 2015. These eight Goals are intended to ensure that further development reaches everyone. The third of these Goals is to “promote gender equality and empower women”.

The year 2010 saw the creation of a single agency under the United Nations for “gender equality and the empowerment of women”, which brought together the agencies that had previously dealt with these objectives. This agency was given the name UN Women and, in the words of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon “will give a strong impetus to UN efforts to promote gender equality, expand opportunities and combat discrimination in the world”.⁶²

⁶¹ *Giulia Paola di Nicola*

⁶² The following is an extract from the UN press release announcing the creation of the new agency: “*United Nations, New York, 2 July 2010* -- In an historic move, the United Nations General Assembly voted unanimously today to create a new entity to accelerate progress in meeting the needs of women and girls worldwide. The establishment of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women — to be known as UN Women — is a result of years of negotiations between UN Member States and advocacy by the global women’s movement. It is part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. ‘I am grateful to Member States for having taken this major step forward for the world’s women and girls,’ said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement welcoming the decision. ‘UN Women will significantly boost UN efforts to promote gender equality, expand opportunity, and tackle discrimination around the globe.’ UN Women merges and will build on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system which focus exclusively on gender

a. Remaining problems and emerging issues

In a culture of materialism, hedonism and consumerism, there are different forms of disrespect for the dignity of women. The systematic exploitation of their sexuality reduces it to a mere instrument of pleasure. The commercialisation of women's bodies and their treatment as objects is often presented to young women

equality and women's empowerment: Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW, established in 1946); International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW, established in 1976); Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI, established in 1997); United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, established in 1976). 'I commend the leadership and staff of DAW, INSTRAW, OSAGI and UNIFEM for their commitment to the cause of gender equality; I will count on their support as we enter a new era in the UN's work for women,' said Secretary-General Ban. 'I have made gender equality and the empowerment of women one of my top priorities — from working to end the scourge of violence against women, to appointing more women to senior positions, to efforts to reduce maternal mortality rates,' he noted. Over many decades, the UN has made significant progress in advancing gender equality, including through landmark agreements such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring on productivity and growth. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination, and are under-represented in decision-making processes. High rates of maternal mortality continue to be a cause for global shame. For many years, the UN has faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally, including inadequate funding and no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues [...] Secretary-General Ban will appoint an Under-Secretary-General to head the new body and is inviting suggestions from Member States and civil society partners. The Under-Secretary-General will be a member of all senior UN decision-making bodies and will report to the Secretary-General. The operations of UN Women will be funded from voluntary contributions, while the regular UN budget will support its normative work. At least US\$500 million — double the current combined budget of DAW, INSTRAW, OSAGI, and UNIFEM — has been recognised by Member States as the minimum investment needed for UN Women [...]'" (Press release United Nations, 2 July 2010, at <http://www.unwomen.org/2010/07/un-creates-new-structure-for-empowerment-of-women/> last accessed 11 December 2010).

as an ideal to which they can attach their fragile dreams. When treated as sex objects, women experience a form of violence against their person. They are being reduced to becoming an object of another person's desires.

Immigration often assumes the characteristics of a kind of modern-day slavery in which women pay the highest price. We can say the same about the case of television show girls [These young attractive women wearing provocative clothes appear as assistants in television shows]. All of this raises the threshold of sexual violence against women. It is almost as if a progressive loss of self control were taking place and, worse, there seems to be a growing intolerance to saying no and refusing to give in to sexual demands⁶³.

There has been no growth in the appreciation and support of motherhood at a social and cultural level. Indeed, very little value is placed on motherhood in our materialistic, hedonistic culture that is focused on success and the pursuit of pleasure. Added to this are attacks on marriage, and on the family which is founded on marriage. What can be done for women if there is no recognition or support for their role as mothers and educators who have a special calling to be custodians of life?

The problem of violence against women continues and at times intensifies or finds new expressions, as in some bad cases of domestic violence. It is also important to note that violence against women also takes place in cases of forced sterilisation, in the forced use of contraceptives, and when they are persuaded to have an abortion. This is particularly cruel when it is inflicted on poor and vulnerable women, and when it is not direct coercion but subtle manipulation that exploits vulnerability and encourages women to make individualistic choices that are against life.

Globalisation has had a negative impact on these issues. It has disseminated a standard of individualism that has brought about a drastic reduction – often by persuasion if not by enforcement – of the

⁶³ Paola Binetti

number of children per woman of childbearing age, even in developing countries⁶⁴.

The issue of “hidden agendas” in the Beijing UN conference continues and has increased dramatically in the last fifteen years. The agendas are no longer hidden, but have become visible and operative.

The Church is in a different situation now. Fifteen years ago we were taken by surprise and started discovering the depth and scope of the 'hidden agenda' of the post-Cold War UN conference process then unfolding. Nowhere in the world are we any longer in a 'pre-revolutionary' situation - nor even in a revolutionary situation: we are in a 'post-revolutionary' situation. This is perhaps clearer in the West than in the non-western world, where societal change is, however, extremely rapid. The Church historically played a critical role in uncovering the gender agenda and in discerning the secularist content of the new ethic. Yet information and education of the faithful remain a largely unaccomplished task within the Church, at the global level: there is still widespread ignorance about the content and process of globalization of the western cultural revolution, about its consequences and history. Yet it is helpful to grasp that the current global secularist ethic was not produced out of nothing, but is the fruit of a long historical process. History reveals that the 'gender ideology' is but one of the many manifestations of the new ethic, that it is not an isolated phenomenon, but a complex one related to a host of other anthropological, cultural and political dysfunctions and to the loss of faith in the world⁶⁵.

The prevalence of this “new global ethic”⁶⁶ is causing an unquestionable cultural revolution. It aims to replace the role of Christian ethics and to profoundly transform our concepts by not speaking in terms of women's vocation to motherhood, but of reproductive rights. It does not speak of the spousal identity of men and women but rather of the couple culture. There is no mention of vocation in the service of love but rather of

⁶⁴ Giulia Paola di Nicola

⁶⁵ Marguerite Peeters

⁶⁶ Cf. M. A. PEETERS, *The new global ethic: challenges for the Church*, Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics, 2006.

empowerment. The concept of mutual male-female complementarity is replaced by the term “gender contract”. Rather than speak of spousal, maternal, filial and fraternal love, we hear of a culture of secular “citizenship”. The anthropological impoverishment that this change implies cannot be ignored.

Terms such as reproductive, sexual, social, economic and political 'rights' of women have been ideologically driven. Time has shown that they have hampered and delayed the real rights of women⁶⁷.

b. Women and men: the core anthropological question (“Gender ideology”)

From 1995 until today the growth and global dissemination of the “gender ideology” is evident. This ideology, which was widely present during the Beijing Conference,⁶⁸ was actually born around the 1950's in the context of the feminist movements and pro-homosexual activism and was developed at universities in the United States with the creation of “gender studies” in the 1970's.

Simone de Beauvoir's assertion is well known: ‘One is not born a woman, one becomes one’, often used to distinguish between biological sex and gender identity. We cannot forget that thoughts on these issues always carry a baggage of ancient injustices, wrongs never repaired and unfounded prejudices that have caused much suffering for many women in the name of a presumed male superiority. But these injustices, many of which are very real and well documented, have been subsequently exaggerated to justify and augment this sort of revolutionary rebellion⁶⁹.

It can be argued that since Beijing this ideology has entered a phase of globalisation. It is exerting an influence on the creation of

⁶⁷ *Pilar Escudero de Jensen*

⁶⁸ “A controversy over the word ‘gender’ that loomed before the conference had been largely defused with a consensus that gender was to be understood according to ordinary usage in the UN context. The Holy See, however, deemed it prudent to attach to its reservations a further, more nuanced, statement of interpretation, in which it dissociated itself from rigid biological determinism as well as from the notion that sexual identity is indefinitely malleable.” (MARY ANN GLENDON, cit.)

⁶⁹ *Paola Binetti*

new concepts and it is changing culture. After fifteen years it is evident that the phase of globalisation is almost complete as gender ideology has spread widely within laws and public institutions.

During the sessions of the 4th Conference and in the final wording of their documents the term gender was used without ever defining what it meant. After some discussion and objections from several delegations, including that of the Holy See, it was clarified that the term should be understood in accordance with its ordinary use within the UN context. However, without an official definition, it has been left open to ambiguity, thereby allowing the term to be used according to a wide variety of anthropological views.

This was the most complicated point because the term took on a different connotation according to the anthropological vision of whoever was using it. Nor was it clear how to distinguish whether it was referring to a 'gender ideology' or to a social science approach, or to any other approaches for which it had previously been used⁷⁰.

Unfortunately, among international agencies in the last fifteen years an ideologically charged interpretation of the term 'gender' has prevailed. Perhaps it is appropriate to clarify that, in itself, the term gender is neutral. Its ideological charge can be explained as a reaction against a concept of sex that sees it as something purely physiological and genital. It is a reaction to the biological reductionism of sex.

The aim of avoiding biological reductionism is, in itself, an aim that we can all share. What has happened is that a kind of culturalism has prevailed that tries to detach sexuality from its essence as a fundamental anthropological factor of each person. This ideology has insinuated itself and gone hand in hand with a refusal to be identified by sex. This has led to sex being separated from gender, as if natural factors always and in every case hold personal freedom captive and stand in the way of cultural and historical development. Gender ideology, by reacting to ideological naturalism, asserts the complete

⁷⁰ *Pilar Escudero de Jensen*

independence of a person from his/her body. It spreads the belief that every individual can establish his/her sexual identity at will and declare it to the public authority. Gender as an ideology ends up transforming sexual orientation into a variable dependent on subjective taste, contexts or needs. Freedom becomes a vague aspiration towards objectives that are considered to be self-gratifying. On the one hand it is true that an anthropology that respects the person is dissociated from a kind of determinism according to which all roles and gender relations are established by a static model determined by nature. On the other hand, however, human beings are not only culture. No matter how hard we try, we cannot free ourselves from nature⁷¹.

This becomes an ideology when its response to biological reductionism causes it to fall into a form of culturalism that considers sexuality to be a mere matter of “choice” and “construction”. Absolute primacy is given to this, completely ignoring the facts of nature. As in any ideology, a partial truth is taken and turned into an absolute. It rejects identification with one's sex and even reaches the point of separating sex from gender. It is as if the facts of nature imprisoned personal freedom and went against the development of the individual. In an attempt to “liberate” sex from the facts of nature, which are regarded as being a form of oppression, sexuality ends up by becoming the fancy of choice, depriving it of its personal dimension, its dimension as a gift.

The absolute independence of a person from his/her own body, as claimed by gender ideology, is an illusion. While it is true to say that a person cannot be caged into a form of determinism that makes relations between the sexes and the roles of each one dependent on nature, it is also true to say that human beings are not pure culture. The facts of nature cannot be cancelled at the whim of the moment. Human beings – men and women – assume their individual identity by implementing a synthesis between nature and culture in their lives.

⁷¹ *Giulia Paola di Nicola*

In fact, those who recognize ontological identity should not rule out the cultural identity acquired by human beings during the process of their primary inculturation, nor should they relinquish it once it is acquired. The recognition of ontological identity may, however, help to discern whether the acquired cultural identity helps to accomplish the innate purpose of ontological identity. In this sense, ontological identity calls for the contribution of a good cultural identity in order to be implemented properly⁷².

This is data that must be taken into consideration in order to approach the truth of the person. Identity is not something that is arbitrarily constructed. A good part of who we are is a gift, a gift that comes with the gift of life. It includes all those parts of ourselves that do not follow our own tastes or whims, but that must be received as a gift. It is in this way that they are to be given in loving relationships and in service to others.

Some of our experts noticed that the anthropological basis of gender ideology is very fragile as it is based on the changing and changeable nature of human desire. It is necessary for Christians to do more to present the richness of an anthropology that emphasises the unity of the human person: body, psyche and spirit.

There was some doubt as to whether or not the term “gender” ought to be used in the present context. Although the term is in itself neutral, it has become highly charged with ideology nowadays and using it can be confusing. However, other experts were in favour of its use as long as it is placed within the rich categories of Christian anthropology.

It is a fact that the term [gender] has gained ground in international and domestic spheres. There are budgets earmarked for such purposes, and training courses. It is a campaign that seeks to cross cover everything. If Catholics abide by the recommendation [to avoid using the term gender] they will leave the field open to radical feminists, who would eliminate the counter-balance achieved by the laity in

⁷² *Marta Rodríguez*

many countries. If we refuse to use the term, radical groups will infiltrate with their own agenda faster⁷³.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to say that, as long as the word is given a meaning in accordance with Christian anthropology, discernment on its use will have to be done in each case. Care must be taken not to cause confusion, and to keep the doors of dialogue open with people of goodwill who are concerned for the genuine welfare of men and women.

Conclusions

Our objective in compiling this study was to look again at the events of 1995, the year in which John Paul II published his Letter to Women and the United Nations convened the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing. It is because of these milestones that we can say that 1995 was an important year for the ecclesial magisterium on women, and also for the current feminine question. This study provided us with an opportunity to look back on events as well as to become familiar with the present situation, to study the problems and formulate objectives to guide our action.

Through the contributions that were sent to us by the experts we had consulted, we became even more aware of the important prophetic role played by John Paul II in 1995. He took every opportunity during that year to continue teaching about the true dignity and vocation of women. He took up many topics that were already present in earlier documents and he enlarged on some new themes. The most notable document that emerged that year on the subject of women was the Letter to Women. The Letter is short but to the point. It establishes a dialogue with women everywhere, and lays out the fundamental points of Christian anthropology as a sure basis for the true defence of the dignity and rights of women. In this sense, the Letter sets out a path that the Church must

⁷³ *María Eugenia Cárdenas*

continue to follow as a participant in a dialogue in which humanity seeks answers. The Church must give light to this discussion through its concept of the human being created male and female.

Our experts chose topics that arise from the Christian biblical anthropology taught by John Paul II. These topics include: reciprocal complementarity between men and women, the essential presence of both with their respective gifts in families, the Church and society, and the importance of continuing to study the richness that this brings; the theology of the body, the depth of the spousal significance of the human body, a precious gift in personal self-development; feminine genius, the importance of avoiding the “masculinisation” of women in order to give them a place in the Church and society, but rather to avail of their specific gifts for this purpose.

When we take up the Beijing documents once again and study their context, we see that many of the real problems facing women were discussed at that Conference. Relevant discussions were opened and some very solid analysis was undertaken. We could take the example of the forcefulness with which the full application of human rights for women and girls was called for in societies where they continue to be considered second-class citizens. The same determination was seen regarding female poverty, inequalities in access to education, and the call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and the female slave trade. Other important topics are the role of women as educators and promoters of peace in situations of conflict, the elimination of occupational segregation and all employment discrimination, the fostering of coordination of responsibilities of men and women in the workplace and home, the safeguarding of the image of women transmitted by the mass media, the elimination of discrimination against girls in education, professional training, health and nutrition. These are all important current issues that are dealt with differently according to regions

of the world, but that must continue to improve if we are to build a decent human society.

Unfortunately, however, the documents that emerged from the Beijing Conference show serious anthropological deficiencies. They opened the way for ideologies to emerge from the contents, and priority was given to implementing the objectives that pointed towards extending gender ideology. A particular view of sexual and reproductive health was promoted that followed reductive paradigms and was tainted with utilitarianism and hedonism. For example, the term “birth control” is used several times throughout the document as a basic human right that would enable women to play a more important role in society.⁷⁴ The frequent recurrence of the word “control” in reference to female fertility leads to the assumption that “control” is equal to health and well-being. On the other hand, access to these means of control very often cause problems in health and fertility. The mentality of our times maintains that control over reality is an ideal to be achieved. There is no longer the dimension of mystery. Control is exercised over how we are born and when and how we die. We have lost a sense of reverence for the mystery of fatherhood and motherhood, for the gift and mystery of life, and for all that this means and brings with it.

It is also noticeable how often the terms “gender” and “gender perspective” are used and how frequently there is a call to implement the latter in legislation, policies, programmes and state projects. There was wide debate in Beijing about what was understood by the term “gender”. There was a final clarifying note

⁷⁴ We shall quote only a few examples: *Platform for Action*, no. 92: “... the limited power many women have over their sexual and reproductive lives and lack of influence in decision-making are social realities which have an adverse impact on their health ... and the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment.”; no. 96: “The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality ...”; no. 97: “The ability of women to control their own fertility forms an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights.”

explaining how the term should be understood, but the meaning of the consensus reached by nations at the Conference was not respected. As we have seen in this present study, an interpretation of the term “gender” that is heavy with ideology is the one that has been most prevalent since the Conference. The experts we consulted have shown that they are concerned about the prevalence of this ideology and about the important anthropological issues that derive from it and are increasingly more prominent in culture at an international level.

While we were working on this present study, we noticed how Pope Benedict XVI has been speaking about the need to foster a “human ecology”.⁷⁵ He has been calling on our contemporaries to defend creation, and he has tied that in with the need to protect humanity from self-destruction. These messages are meant to alert us to the fact that self-emancipation from creation and the Creator is an illusion. They teach us that acceptance of the message of creation is not at variance with our freedom. It actually makes it possible. These teachings by the Holy Father provide us with a frame of reference with which to look back and understand the way things have been going since 1995 and the challenges that lie in the future. These past few years have shown us clearly the relevance of the task that is being asked of us by Pope Benedict. This task could be carried out very efficiently if we use the tools given to us by Blessed John Paul II when he presented Christian anthropology in a way suited to our times.

That is why we believe that it is necessary and urgent to educate lay people and everyone involved in pastoral ministry in the important anthropological issues of our times. In many of these issues the teachings of the Church correspond with the common sense of most people, and with the heritage handed down throughout history. They stand in contrast to the agendas and

⁷⁵ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Christmas greetings to the members of the Roman Curia and Prelature, 22 December 2008; See also: Address during the visit to the Federal Parliament in the Reichstag Building, Berlin, 22 September 2011.

ideologies that are being imposed on the dominant culture. The role of the Church as guardian of the truth about humanity is becoming greater at this time in history, and the Church feels the urgency to exercise this service. The education of the laity is essential. They are at the forefront wherever these issues are being addressed, in schools, universities, workplace, media and the world of politics and culture.

We must help in the ongoing task of educating pastoral workers and the laity in general so that they may safeguard the human being, created male and female. This education will mean providing instruments to enable people to be critical of the cultural revolution that is being imposed. This will help individuals and communities to recognise the depth and beauty of Christian anthropology and to offer and present it to our culture today.

Education on the anthropological challenges of the new ethic are part of the mission of evangelisation of the Church. It must be done in the ‘capillary’ way described in *Christifideles Laici*. The revolution will leave behind a huge vacuum because it does not give an answer to the cry of this generation that is clamouring for love and truth⁷⁶.

Within this great task there is a particularly important role for Christian women and the women of our times. Blessed John Paul II spoke of how God entrusted human beings to women in a special way⁷⁷. That is why the education of the laity is particularly urgent with regard to women. It enables them to take their place in safeguarding the human, and makes them aware of the growing anthropological crisis of our times. It helps them to preserve values and basic human truths.

Work must be done in providing training programmes for lay leaders, women, youth and families in the areas of marriage preparation and cultural projects that can present the truth, goodness and beauty of Christian anthropology. As well as presenting developments in philosophy, theology and

⁷⁶ *Marguerite Peeters*

⁷⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, 30.

anthropology, living witness must be seen. This can be applied in different ways according to regions and nations in order to respond to local and global needs.