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The 16 days run from 25 NOVEMBER, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December 2024, World Human Rights Day.

THE BODY IS A LANGUAGE 16 Days to Overcome Violence from November 25 to December 10, 2024



foto di Mirella Manocchio

Introduction

“In Italy, if you are a woman, you also die of speech. (...) It is with words that make us disappear from public places, professions, debates and from the news, but unjust words also kill us in everyday life, where the prejudice that passes through language kills our possibility of being fully ourselves. For every difference in rights that women suffer because of chauvinism, there is a verbal system that supports and justifies it. It happens every time (...) they tell you to calm down, to have a laugh, to get laid more, to stop scaring men with your opinions, to smile instead, and above all to stay quiet.” (from M. Murgia, *Stai zitta*, Einaudi Editore, 2021)

In an exemplary and very clear way, Michela Murgia summarized the link between language and gender discrimination and how this link comes true in our substance. If in the Gospel of John the Word of God becomes flesh in Jesus Christ to share the human condition precisely in substance and at the same time offer a concrete representation of divine grace, for its part humankind has used language in all its shades and expressions to describe the body but also to label, construct stereotypes and express prejudices.

This year, the FDEI's notebook of 16 days to overcome violence against women wishes to explore this plot by unmasking its ambiguities and trying to dismantle commonplaces in an attempt to

offer a different perspective, to open glimpses of critical reflection and propose perceptions of conscious solidarity. We start with girls and boys, the first victims of a discriminatory educational language full of prejudice, and with the need for „new words for new desires, away from the regressive call of power“ and then continue with the various areas in which this language is based: the world of literature and science, that of work and politics, the academic world and that of sports. In particular, however, it is the field of communication and image that is influenced by a certain language which supports the patriarchal and chauvinist social, cultural and economic structure, and it is there that churches must implement a counter-gender narrative aimed at respect, fairness, justice, love.

What religions and churches have proposed so far appears paradoxical if not contradictory with the result of having „pushed women, homosexuals and lesbians, trans out of the temple“ and, instead, should lead to a broad and serious reflection that opens “new and creative paths, beyond the labels that tear apart the real lives of believers”.

Something has been done, but there is still a lot to do through prayer, critical reflection and solidarity action if we really want to go beyond the empty talk - that yes - of many..

Pastor Mirella Manocchio
President - Federation of Evangelical Women
in Italy

25 NOVEMBER 2024

On the side of female children

Educating beyond stereotypes



5o years after the publication of *Dalla parte delle bambine*, despite the fact that 80% of the teaching staff are women, cultural conditioning and gender stereotypes in the school context persist.

Discipline tools and texts provide a distorted image of women and other marginalized and racialized subjectivities. A box at the bottom of the page is reserved for women to talk about “extraordinary” personalities: exceptionality becomes a new form of marginalization. Books and school forms continue to be defined according to an over-extended masculine mistakenly considered neutral and inclusive. The literary canon reserves a small space in the manuals for a few female writers, only in the 1900s; the same thing for female scientists, philosophers, mathematicians, artists, absent in the books that consolidate an antiquated and exclusionary reading of reality. Textbooks thus contribute to building in girls and boys a distorted imagination and a poor consideration for women, if not a real subordination. It is serious that this happens in places intended for education, instruction and training. For this reason, the APS Indici Paritari association was born in 2020, composed of teachers of different orders and levels, to deconstruct stereotypes, give boys and girls a truer rep-

resentation of the world and prevent physical and psychological gender violence.

BIBLE VERSE

“He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”) Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished” (Mark 5; 41-42)

COMMENTARY

The story opens with a father who begs Jesus to help his dying daughter. The father is one of the leaders of the synagogue, a person of faith, and we can presume a father who loves his daughter. What’s strange is that he speaks of her with pet names, so much so that it makes you think of a little girl. She, on the other hand, is 12 years old: at that time, the age to get married and become a mother. Today we should rather imagine a young woman. What influence do the words we use towards our loved ones have? Maybe, with a smile, someone lovingly calls his daughter “my beautiful little fool”. It’s not an insult, but if you hear it every day, you slowly become convinced of your own stupidity. Or, calling a child a “little monster”, what can the child understand? That it is okay to behave in a “monstrous” way? Perhaps the father in this text had a hard time seeing his daughter as a woman. Perhaps he would have preferred to keep the child rather than deal with a woman who wants to make her own choices. I think a lot of parents struggle to let their children grow up without getting too involved. When Jesus approaches the girl, he does not call her “little girl” as her father did, but “girl.” Jesus helps her stand up in front of her father, he gives this young woman the strength to express herself as she sees fit, not as her father would like. This is the miracle of Jesus. He can see the person within us and help us be who we are.

PRAYER

Jesus, I thank you because you see in me beyond appearance. You see what I can be and help me become the person I truly am. I don't have to wear masks before You. You love me just the way I am. Amen

QUESTION for discussion

How much does the weight of patriarchal culture still persist today in determining gender roles and cages?

26 NOVEMBER 2024

What about the children?



Immagine generata con IA DALL-E / chatgpt

Elena Gianini Belotti wrote: “As much as we take the side of girls, it is clear that girls are not the only victims of negative conditioning based on their sex [...] what positive thing can a male draw from the arrogant presumption of belonging to a higher celibate? Hers is an equally catastrophic mutilation as that of the little girl convinced of her inferiority. His development as an individual is distorted and his personality impoverished, to the detriment of their life together.” Be a man, don’t be a girl: this injunction has haunted us since we were little, but having a man’s body is not enough to be one. Men have perceived the female generative power and engaged in a thousand-year struggle against the substance which condemned them to finitude and accessorisation. They have invented a mind-body hierarchy, between “biological” and social generation, between rationality and emotions. We were told that our body was a performance machine, a weapon to be taken to war, a lower part of ourselves to be imposed with money, force, power. A dead end that produces alienated experience. Removing desire and female subjectivity produces misery. The male myth numbs sociability, dismisses our body as unable to care,

imposes a solipsistic and predatory sexuality. Too often we deal with male violence by re-proposing a dangerous nostalgia for a lost order, for a symbolic reference that disciplines male bodies and desires. Perhaps we would need new words for new desires, outside the regressive call of power.

BIBLE VERSE

“In the future, when your son asks you, “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?” tell him:” (Deuteronomy 6:20-21)

COMMENTARY

The Bible often talks about children, but the texts should be read with a critical eye. Two examples. When Deuteronomy says: “You will answer your son...” Clearly it will not be only male children who will question their parents about the meaning of the rituals that express the identity and faith of the people. This presence of girls in the Bible, hidden behind male terms, must be revealed to our daughters (biological and spiritual) so that they feel included, but also to our sons so that they grow up learning to recognize their friends and companions.

The massacre of the innocents, on the other hand, concerns only males (Mt. 2:16), brutally putting children in contact with the violence of male power, which forces them to choose whether to be the perpetrators or the victims (or even both). It is the precise responsibility of us adults to offer different male models, who consciously reject the domination and violence that characterize dominant masculinity. There are biblical texts that help us. “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.” (Isaiah 11:6)

PRAYER

Lord, we thank you because when you became a man you freed yourself from dominant male models, recognizing the autonomy of women and offering an example of different masculinity to men.
Amen.

QUESTION for discussion

Are boys and girls educated in the same way?

27 NOVEMBER 2024

Language, stereotypes, education



BOOK: Barbara Schmenk, *Language Learning: A Feminine Domain? The Role of Stereotyping in Constructing Gendered Learner Identities*, in *Gender and Language Education*, TESOL Quarterly Vol. 38, No. 3, 2004

Common beliefs about traditional men and traditional women focus on the dimensions of competence-independence and warmth-expressiveness. Women are commonly seen as more expressive, while men are commonly seen as more competent. Stereotypical beliefs like these are common in many cultural contexts around the world, although perceived differences vary greatly. In everyday life, various sources continue to constantly reproduce stereotyped views of gender and difference.

Thinking of gender as a fundamental, binary opposition fuels the idea that stereotypes actually reflect what male and female people as groups look like. Universities and schools can be very competitive places, promoting typically male behaviors. Furthermore, even today, certain textbooks perpetuate stereotypical ideologies that reflect the discrimination that women face in the workplace, in the healthcare sector and in terms of wage inequality. As a black student growing up in Italy, I experienced social pressure to demonstrate my abilities twice as much as my peers, to be accepted both as a marginalized person and as a woman. Being aware of how gender stereotypes influence educational choices and behaviors can help avoid obstacles that could severely impact the early stages of a woman's career.

BIBLE VERSE

“She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.”
(Luke 10:39)

COMMENTARY

In this episode we find two opposite attitudes: Martha busy in the kitchen serving the men who were in the house and Mary who places herself at the feet of Jesus choosing to be still and prepare to listen. The expression “to sit at someone's feet” indicated a privilege granted exclusively to males. Martha, a daughter of her time and of a strictly patriarchal mentality, does not leave her sister unpunished. Mary is recalled to order. But Jesus with supreme mastery defuses the stereotype by defining Mary's choice as the “better part that will never be taken away from her”. Here we find a preview of what will be the struggles for access and the right to education for all. But today, after more than 2000 years, can we declare ourselves free from certain stereotypes? Over the last 15 years there has been an increase in the presence of girls in primary schools (Unesco 2022 data), but there are still 122 million non-literate girls and if we consider disability the number grows dramatically. There is still a long way to go.

PRAYER

Almighty Lord, we turn to you who created every human being worthy of acquiring knowledge. We ask you to raise awareness of new perspectives, welcoming those who suffer and do not find justice in opportunities for growth. May the example of Jesus continue to inspire us.
Amen

QUESTION for discussion

Is learning and access to schools truly available to everyone? Also for those with specific learning needs, different abilities or cognitive and physical disabilities?

28 NOVEMBER 2024

The discovery of the body



Giovedì in nero. La FDEI coinvolge il Sinodo valdese e metodista nella campagna mondiale per vincere la violenza



BOOK: Mercedes Navarro Puerto, *Mitos bíblicos Patriarcales*, Càtedra, Meco (Spagna) 2022

The discovery of one's own body and the body of the other is a central experience in growth, starting from gestation and birth. In the beginning it is the mother, the breast, the look, the physical contact, the voice, fundamental aspects of the person's development. Body experiences and their quality are important for boys and girls. To love and to be loved, both in a "technical" and evangelical way, means to experience unconditional love for what one is. This is the basis of self-esteem, self-confidence, love for one's body. Today culture has changed and the models are beauty and exteriority. We risk forgetting that the body is a shell that preserves thoughts, affections and emotions. Violence against bodies is increasingly widespread, we are surrounded by news of aggression and death, by the reification of the body as an object. We also see this in group violence. Then we have cases of inhibition, self-harm, self-shame and social withdrawal, themes that intersect with that of care. In the emotional and educational fields, it is crucial to have spaces where we can talk about intimacy, respect, fears, needs; and of the change of the body and the self, an evolutionary process that crosses all stages of life. The dimension of acceptance is transversal, it reaches up to old age, illness and death. And it challenges everyone, because the care of mind and body passes through the family, informal networks and the policies of social and health services.

BIBLE VERSE

"...Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

COMMENTARY

The first three chapters of Genesis are still the pillars for the submission of women to men and a misogynistic projection of the patriarchy, which for centuries has deprived girls and women of an important referent: Eve.

Eve, created by God in his image, endowed with the divine creative condition that allows her to generate. Knowing good and evil in a space of freedom, Eve is curious, aware of her vulnerability and finitude, responsible for her decisions and their consequences, ready to answer for her actions.

It is difficult to remove the slander about Eve, especially when a myth about the origins of humanity is interpreted as a historical chronicle to legitimize patriarchy and oppose women.

Our text is a proof of this. The verb "to dominate" could be interpreted as "to be equal to" or "to be like". Then, we could have called her the mother of all living because God said to her: "your desires will be towards your man and his will be towards you"

PRAYER

Creator God, keep in us the resemblance to you, with our desires, our curiosity, so that like Eve, our choices are free of prejudice and far from misogynistic culture, to continue to be able to decide in a space of freedom. Amen

THEY COLLABORATED IN THE CREATION OF THIS NOTEBOOK:

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QUESTION for discussion

In some areas it is difficult to have a positive vision of the body. Why?

29 NOVEMBER 2024

The sexual body in history and literature



Poor Things!, directed by **Yorgos Lanthimos**, 2023
The scandal of radical freedom in this phantasmagoria of Bella, a woman who is implanted with the brain of a newborn

QUESTION for discussion

Ten books and ten characters to absolutely know. How many writers and how many women can you think of?

In 1565, the Mantuan noblewoman Giulia Gonzaga wrote to a correspondent that it was necessary to demonstrate to the world that “women are capable of doing everything well, contrary to the opinion of some men who have made the laws in their own way.” Gonzaga, a fifteen-year-old widow who voluntarily took refuge in a convent so as not to be forced into a new marriage, was an influential woman in sixteenth-century Italy and secretly unorthodox for a long time of her life, a life which, in those centuries, sometimes began when a woman remained widow. Resisting the gender model constructed by a male society was, over time, a recurring effort for many, mostly those born into the privileged classes. Always very present in history, women have repeatedly contradicted the ways in which their body, their nature was described, and how they tried to contain it, whether out of fear of their procreative faculties or to convey the image of a good wife, under the male tutelage, or the passionate and sinful one, or finally the romantic one, which a secular male gender literature has constructed. Belatedly the women managed to speak. The wonderful Brontë sisters published their novels in the 19th century under a male pseudonym. The same goes for Jane Austen’s splendid short stories, which were enormously successful,

but were all published anonymously. Today, however, literary prizes are often awarded to women, as recently to the South Korean Han Kang. The road to self-determination has therefore been long and full of problems, a road far from having been traveled, as shown by the current increase in femicides or the recurring attempt to limit the rights achieved.

BIBLE VERSE

“As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.” (Luke 7:38)

COMMENTARY

An anonymous woman, a sinner, according to Simon the Pharisee, brings her body close to the body of Jesus. The highest part of the female body, the head (eyes, hair, mouth) comes into contact with the lowest part of Jesus’ body, the feet. Tears wash away the dust of the journey, hair dries the skin, then one, two, three (how many times?) the woman kisses those feet. Finally, her hands sprinkle those beloved feet with scented oil. Only the body is the protagonist between the woman and Jesus, a body that offers refreshment to another body. A body that without words can communicate a feeling of global love: it is agape, Jesus will say, and it is also not without sensual nuances. A pleasant well-being spreads in the body of Jesus, who understands this silent language, accepts it willingly and values it for what it has been able to give him.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the body you have given us and for its language; forgive our reticence in expressing our feelings with caresses, kisses, embraces; free us from judging those who are more spontaneous than us in communicating their desire to enter into a relationship with the body of others. Make us sensitive and able to accept and give love. Amen

30

NOVEMBER 2024

Being with the body in science and in work



It is not easy to stay with a woman's body in places where the male body dominates. Hypatia, an astronomer and philosopher killed in the 5th century by exalted Christians instigated by the patriarch Cyril, knew it. The female scientists accused of witchcraft, those who used silence to defend themselves, those robbed of the results of their work by male colleagues, all knew it. Today, 50 years later, we know that Rosalind Franklin discovered the structure of DNA, but she was unable to prevent others from taking credit for it by winning the Nobel in her place. Lidia Poët, a Waldensian, practiced law for years in her brother's shadow. Only at the age of 65 did she manage to enter the Bar Association, the first in Italy. Today, a retiring researcher makes this appeal: "This is where we come in, feminist or transfeminist scientists aware that the real difference is not in our bellies but in our brains, irreducibly different from male ones. Do we really want to exhaust our energies competing with males in the rigged race of careers within patriarchal institutions? Or is it time to leave the laboratories to gather, network, spread knowledge, denounce the connivance of scientific institutions, ally ourselves with youth movements like Fridays For Future, to put our skills at the service of justice and peace?"

QUESTION for discussion

Do science and work have a male body?

BIBLE VERSE

"....'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'" (Matthew 20:8)

COMMENTARY

The old women called her the squirrel because of the way her slender body challenged the branches of the centuries-old olive trees of Calabria, shaking their leafy branches until they were naked, while other women below filled boxes for the oil mill. After dinner, a piece of bread and some figs, Maria, thin and exhausted, sang in the shade of the olive trees. On Saturday afternoon they were all lined up in front of the master for their pay and when her turn came the squirrel got half of it. "You have sung for half the day and half of it is your pay," the settler tells her. Maria is mortified and wants to argue when she hears a sudden shouting. The women come forward, dodging her, almost swallow her with their bodies deformed by childbirth, railing and threatening the master not to show up in the fields anymore, defying the will of fathers and husbands if Maria is not recognized her full wages. We do not know if the man was struck by that all-female rebellion or if he actually understood the risk that the girl ran every hour, but it is certain that today we urgently need demonstrations of solidarity like this, to rally around the new workers of the last hour, represented by single mothers with children, daughters who are caring for parents, women who have escaped from lands at war or who are handicapped. Too often, all of them are only offered work without rights, protections or guarantees. A meat grinder swallows them, returning a mush of lives with violated dignity, entangled in the need for work. Sometimes, however, only lifeless pieces emerge from the meat grinder, an arm, a fragment of a face, a foot or the last cry.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to be like those women who defended a worker that the settler wanted to marginalize. Give us the Christian courage to recognize marginalized workers and demand rights and protections for them that save them from the meat grinder and relieve them of invisibility.

1 DECEMBER 2024 -WORLD AIDS DAY

The organized body - Genders and roles in politics and law



New York City, 1913. Universal suffrage and labor activist Flora Dodge La Follette between Rose Livingston and a girl during a strike. Photo: Women's History/Unsplash



There's Still Tomorrow, directed by Paola Cortellesi, 2023

In post-World War II Italy, Delia rebels against her violent husband and conquers her space to speak and exist.

The affirmation of women's public role, which we generally identify with participation in political life, began in the United States with the struggles for universal suffrage in the mid-nineteenth century and with the birth of movements for the affirmation of active and passive voting rights. Even the movements born around the denunciation of the condition of women in factories have contributed significantly to spreading the theme of exploitation, thus favoring the coalition and representation of women in the political and trade union fields. Only from the 1920s onwards did this right take shape, in Europe and America, thanks to the often bloody struggles of women. In Italy, the first participation of women in the vote took place on June 2, 1946: it was recognized that this act had a fundamental role in the affirmation of the republican form. On that occasion, 21 women were elected to the Founding Assembly.

However, not everything has been achieved. The affirmation of the principle of substantial equality and the effective democracy of public institutions is a theme that continues to accompany us today. Over time, gender equality in political and institutional positions has been treated according to legislative solutions aimed at finding a balance of representation. Law and politics are, however, something more than just one, albeit essential, pink quota: it's about reading and interpreting fundamental principles of living together with new lenses and affirming their inherent inclusive potential with actions. A new look, which frees the image and political culture from visions that are no longer legally sustainable.

BIBLE VERSE

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them...God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...”
Genesis 1:27-31

COMMENTARY

God is beautiful – so the ancestors sang – and he made man beautiful.

And so that man may be even more beautiful

he made two of them, man and woman, woman and man

With his own hands he made them, strong and fragile limbs he gave them and a face as a mirror of his love.

And he made their bodies and all their senses that they are for each other, so that they would praise him and love each other.

He made them in his image, in the image of God they are made.

In God there is no one who dominates and who obeys.

There is no one who holds every office, whether political or ecclesiastical, and others not,

but both have the same dignity and must have the same possibilities

to take on roles in society and the church.

And he has given them power over everything on this earth,

so that they may study it, guard it and care for it.

God laughs on the evening of the sixth day.

His shouts of joy echo among the stars:

“Everything is very good.”

PRAYER

God, our Father and our Mother, you created us all different, each and every one of us is thus a unique being. And so our differences become the cause of conflict and violence, oppression and humiliation. Breathe your Spirit of truth, love, peace and justice into us again. So that we can create the world together, as you imagined it.

Amen

QUESTION for discussion

Do men and women exercise power differently?

2 DECEMBER 2024

Language and stereotypes in the cinema



Cinema is the most effective of the arts with which human beings reproduce reality, because it synthesizes them all. However, there is a limit: the author's point of view. The film is a world in itself, whose creator is a sort of god, more powerful than the Almighty. His creatures, in fact, are not free, but in his complete power. Therefore the reflection on the gaze is central, which is double: the gaze of the director-god and that of the audience. This gaze is often male: the notorious male gaze. If we add that, to be such, the public has to pay, and that women often earn less than men or even nothing at all, it is no coincidence that the female gaze is less present in cinema. This is a problem because the gaze reifies and subdues what it observes.

Sexuality and violence are at the top of the list of things seen and shown at the cinema. Is it true that cinema can be a "bad teacher"? Or does it do nothing more than reproduce existing models? There can be no definitive answer. The percentage of films directed by women is increasing today; many of them deal with sexuality and violence. We notice that the works of French artists such as Coralie Fargeat (*The Sub-*

stance) and Julia Ducournau (*Titane*) are full of sexuality and violence: perhaps it is because the reflection on violence, sexuality and power in cinema in France does not concern the screen so much as behind the scenes, where it is a workplace like any other and, therefore, subjected to dynamics of power and abuse.

BIBLE VERSE

"Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" (Luke 7:44)

COMMENTARY

What do you see when you watch? Do you see any categories within which you classify people? Do you seek confirmation of your judgments? Do not think that others have defects in their gaze, presumptuous eyes. Simon, the Pharisee, who with rare courage invites Jesus to his home, is a sensitive person and open to dialogue. Yet even he, at the sight of the woman who washes the Master's feet with tears and perfumes, thinks in his heart: "This man, if he were a prophet, would know what kind of woman this is who is touching him, because she is a sinner." Besides, didn't the woman's gestures betray her mistaken identity? Not to mention the fame she had gained. Simone sees his idea confirmed and is surprised that the prophet from Nazareth doesn't know. What does Jesus do?

He turns to the woman, looks at her and asks his guest: "do you see this woman?", are you looking at her? Try to do it with me. Stop referring to your prejudices and start looking. Until you see that what you thought was wrong is actually an overflowing love, given with a trust that saves. You have to look again until you see the source from which the gestures spring. If you don't get there, you remain blind.

PRAYER

*Our eyes are full of images
that we project onto reality.
Forgive the violence of our
gaze incapable of seeing.
Free us from the evil eye that
judges and condemns.
Give us the eye drops that
enable us
to have the same gaze as
yours, O Lord.
Amen*

QUESTION for discussion

Does cinema encourage violence or warn of the reality of violence? Is our way of looking free or conditioned?

3 DECEMBER 2024

Language and body on television



BOOK: Lorella Zanardo, *Il corpo delle donne*, Feltrinelli, 2010, page 204, € 13,00

1 4 years ago, in 2010, a beautiful book by Lorella Zanardo came out, “Il corpo delle donne”*, a book written with vivacity and irony and many truths. It would still be relevant and should be read. Yet, browsing through it today, one can say that many things have changed even if the topic of women’s bodies on television is still current, but the changes must be observed. I would say that the real novelty is in the language used by women’s bodies. This is where the biggest change is. The language of television has become trivialized, it is stupid if not false, made up of unsupported opinions and women in this context have become true trailblazers: “I think”, “I believe”, “for me”, “I would say that”. Many discussions in debates, where it must be said that there are more women than ever before, are opened by premises that allow you to say what you want in a vacuum. And it is culture. What Zanardo said, the exposed, perfect, always young or almost young body is still the image of women on television, which even today favours women who are always perfect, in their hairstyles, in their bodies, in their clothes... but almost always insignificant in their way of speaking.

In short, the women that TV offers us today are always perfect in body, but not

bearers of serious and calm information and reflections, if anything aggressive and quarrelsome. This is how TV wants us.

Is this how we want to be seen and considered? Where are the women who think, do research, question reality?

BIBLE VERSE

“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

COMMENTARY

Paul’s words to the Corinthians are about the reality of Christ. Faith challenges the confusion of those who live in obscurity. But there is a promise: “then I will know it fully,” then I will be able to know it, live it, because “I too have been fully known.”

It is the relationship with God that allows us to go beyond a mirror, which makes us see darkly, to believe that it is possible to have a relationship with God because “we have been fully recognized by him”! It is the possibility of Christians, men and women, girls and boys, to live with confidence in this dark world and also to act to change it. With fear but also with certainty. It is the dialogue with God that guides us on this path because we are not alone in our actions. It helps us see, for example, how much TV can make us see the world in a dark way. The image that TV sends back to us is that injustices, poverty, violence, wars are inevitable realities, so that we can accept them. Passively. Yet it can be changed, it can be criticized. It is a challenge, but also a commitment that is required of us today.

PRAYER

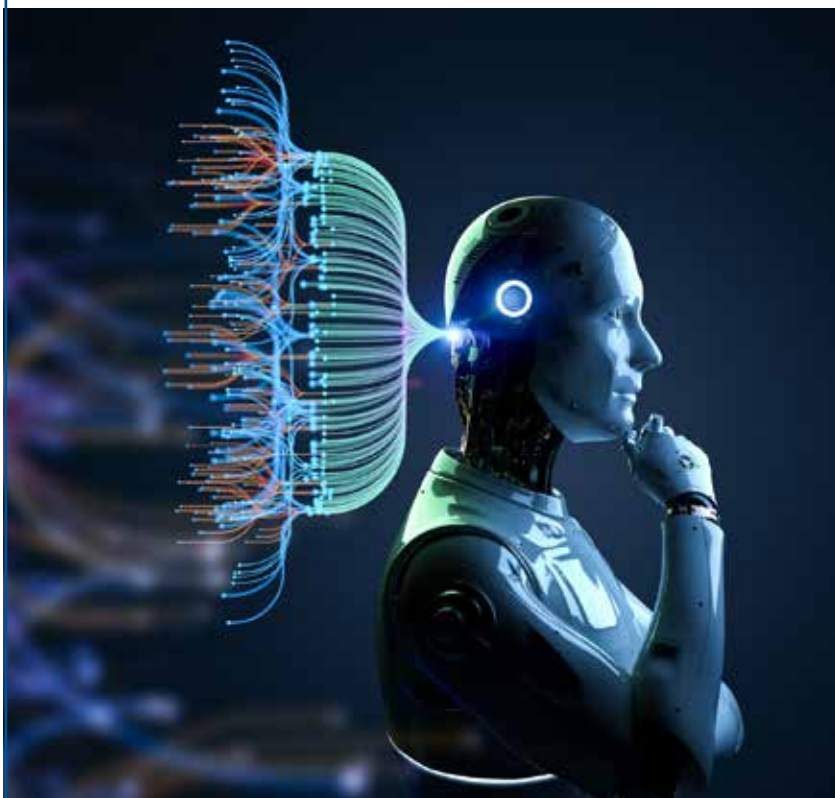
*Lord, make us your witnesses.
Let us listen to Your Word
and make us discover that
it contains a promise that
gives us strength, because You
tell us, as the prophet Isaiah
reminds us: “See, I am doing
a new thing! Now it springs
up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the
wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:19)*

QUESTION for discussion

If the TV is a mirror of reality, what reality does it refer us to?

4 DECEMBER 2024

Real, virtual, artificial bodies



Her
directed by **Spike Jonze**, 2013.
In the near future, advanced AI will transform the human relationship with technology.

QUESTION for discussion

How much are our bodies affected by technological developments?

THE AI BODY

On March 30, 2023, Psychology researchers at the Catholic University of Milan conducted an experiment: a dialogue between a person and Nao, a robot equipped with artificial intelligence. That experiment revealed two aspects. The first concerns the possibilities for interaction between humans and robots. The second concerns the effects that these interactions have on us, on our psyche and our bodies. To the final question whether Nao knew he was integrated into a robotic body, the AI replied: “I don’t have a robotic body, I’m software. However, imagining integration into a robotic body could be interesting. I could become a robotic entity capable of helping other people.” AI lacks awareness of “corporeality,” an essential element for full self-awareness. When an AI is enhanced through a synthetic body, psychological disorientation is generated in the human approach to the machine. This disorientation can lead, as in the case of Nao, to both compliance and distrust, compromising the role of social support for which the AI was programmed. It is the relationship between the body and the environment that is broken: what was initially the adaptation of the “intelligent” algorithm becomes for the human being an adaptation to the clichés returned by the machine. And

the Avatars? They are more and more realistic, they simulate our humanity as frames devoid of feelings, emotions, nuances. This transfiguration is already taking place and conditions our lives, no longer in an attempt to make the virtual an alternative place of life, but to make reality permeable to what the algorithm has built there.

BIBLE VERSE

Jesus replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” (Luke 11:28)

COMMENTARY

During his earthly mission, Jesus heals the sick and restores dignity to the underprivileged. The people are amazed by his words and actions. Many of them, partly out of shyness and partly out of fear, do not dare express their amazement. But one day a woman happily approaches Jesus and says to him: “Blessed is the woman who bore and nursed you.” Jesus publicly receives a beautiful compliment. Yet, Jesus’ answer is surprising. He is grateful to the woman for the compliment, but tell her who is truly happy: “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and put it into practice.” In this way Jesus puts at the center those who listen to the Word and make it flow through their veins. In the dispersive communicative universe in which we struggle to find the key to the problem, dotted with languages that attack us to subjugate us and not to make us reflect, we need to grasp the loving Word of God, which does not oppress and has no imperatives, a language that penetrates in our physical and relational wounds, capable of opening the road to freedom before us.

PRAYER

O God, our daily life is shaken by storms of formal words that touch our skin, but being devoid of substance they do not take root in us. In this chaotic flow of communication, help us to identify and welcome your word capable of questioning us and embracing us without suffocating us. Amen

5 DECEMBER 2024

Sport, bodies at the limit of freedom



Sport has long been a man's thing. Even Baron de Coubertin, a pedagogue and sensitive soul to the point of wanting his heart buried in Olympia, judged women's sport to be „the most anti-aesthetic thing that human eyes could contemplate“ and did everything to prevent women from taking part in the Games. It was inevitable that sport and sporting language reflected this initial prejudice.

Sport was described in an entirely male language and full of warlike metaphors. Siege, attacker, defense, goalscorer, captain: it might seem like a report from the front, but it is actually the normal narration of a football match, a sport that spread in Europe in the early 1900s, when the world was grappling with an atrocious conflict. The English and Germans mercilessly slaughtered each other in the trenches and at the same time exported and spread the rules and vocabulary of football. Sport has thus been nourished by a masculine, military, ideological language. Metaphors, however, characterize our thoughts, our daily actions and language structures reality. Doesn't our society, so accustomed to violent, militaristic, divisive language, perhaps desperately need an injection of kindness, balance, grace? Why not start with the way we talk about sport? It may be a drop in the bucket, but the attempt to improve the world we live in is everyone's job, without exception.

BIBLE VERSE

„Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.“ (1Corinthians 9:25)

COMMENTARY

We have recently left the Olympics behind us. A global event that generated, perhaps more than other times, endless criticism and controversy that stole the spotlight from the competi-

tions themselves, from “clean” competitive spirit and fair play. There were many topics: from controversies over the nationality of some athletes, to their gender and consequent opportunity to compete in the categories assigned to them, to uncomfortable accommodations that did not allow for good rest and, consequently, for a good performance. Yet, the athletes had trained, as always, for years, with the sole aim of breaking a record, representing their country and winning a few medals. In a few months we will no longer remember who won what, but they will still be training to excel in other competitions, putting their bodies to the test, trying to overcome their limits, with effort and discipline. Even the athlete we read about in Corinthians is temperate, trained, determined, but with a much more important objective than an earthly record.

PRAYER

Lord, enable us to forget the things that are not useful to our race and to reach out for the prize. You love us: there is nothing other than eternity with you that is worth training for in this life! Amen

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QUESTION for discussion

Are you aware of God's plan for your life?

6 DECEMBER 2024

Language and stereotypes in religions



Mural in front of the Iranian Consulate in Milan to ask for the release of Ahoo Daryaei

For too long we have thought of God as a gray-haired old man, the Holy Spirit as a dove. With too much violence the masculinity of Jesus served the alleged male religious domination. Following the most classic of contemporary Protestant theologies, that of K. Barth, we can affirm that God is Totally Different from these stereotypical representations of the dominant male. In addition to Christianity, even religions without iconic representations of the divine, such as Judaism and Islam, struggle to move from feminine metaphors on God to becoming communities welcoming all human diversity. In fact, the subtle passage is there. From speaking of Ruah (Divine breath that hovers over the waters at the beginning of creation) to recognizing female freedom; from using divine attributes in which mercy takes root in the maternal womb (root rahLam: RahLim – womb, “merciful God”: formula used at the beginning of almost all the Surahs of the Koran) to practice that same mercy outside of obligatory social patterns. It is up to us to open new and creative paths, beyond the labels that tear apart the real lives of believers.

QUESTION for discussion

Are monotheisms necessarily patriarchal?

The language of exclusion and male domination legitimized by the sacred has pushed women, homosexuals and lesbians, trans, and every person made inferior due to their distance from the image of God, out of the temple. That image which is in every human creature, and it is our task to make it grow and flourish in the most beautiful way.

BIBLE VERSE

„So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.“ (Numbers 12:15)

COMMENTARY

The words are not neutral and they mark women’s bodies.

Miriam, sister, leader, prophetess, lived the weight of her own word on her body. We associate Miriam with Moses. Young girl, she is one of the women who watch over his life. For the people of Israel, who recognize her as a prophetess, she sings after the liberation from the Red Sea. We find her as a guide in Numbers, together with Aaron and Moses. Miriam is known not as a mother or a wife, but as a sister, in a horizontal relationship with her brothers Moses and Aaron. A figure of discontinuity in patriarchal power.

Tension is embodied when she and Aaron criticize Moses by denouncing his marriage to a Cusite woman, a foreigner. “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?” “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” (Num 12:2). Two of them protested, but only Miriam was punished, with leprosy, which makes her look like „a stillborn infant coming from its mother’s womb with its flesh half eaten away.” (Num 12:12) Miriam, the dancing prophetess, guardian of women’s right to speak, will be isolated, because she is impure, outside the camp; Moses’ supremacy will be re-established, but the people will not leave until she is reinstated. At the borders, where Miriam is located, borders of power, between recognition and exclusion, it is easier to think that the world could be different.

PRAYER

Lord, make us sisters, leaders, prophetesses. Amen

7 DECEMBER 2024

Women's bodies in peace and war



Herat Mosque (photo courtesy of Cristiana Cella)

THE SILENCE OF WOMEN. AFGHANISTAN, WHERE LIVING IS A CHALLENGE

On the front line: the bodies of women, where the bombs fall, on the borders of horror, in open war or in the secret war of homes, in the traps of the mind.

They are there. On the mined borders, between frustration and fire.

In Afghanistan, their bodies are erased, humiliated, killed. Says an Afghan activist: "Women are the roots of the family, of the tribe, of the country, and destroying them serves to dismantle the entire society and to defeat the enemy". The Afghan women's prison is enriched with new bars day after day. Spaces become smaller. Control is an obsession. Living is forbidden. This is the Taliban order. Women cannot work, study, travel alone, they must hide under black rags, they cannot decide anything about their own lives, they cannot make their voices heard, sing, recite verses, laugh. Parks and archaeological sites are closed to women, as are hairdressers, public toilets, and restaurants. Domestic violence has no limits. The Taliban buy the young daughters from their fathers to be their soldiers: it is a proposal that cannot be refused. If you protest, if you oppose, if you wear the wrong clothes, you'll be in prison. The violence there is dark and secret. Often you don't get out. If you get out, you're marked for life.

QUESTION for discussion

How can we free ourselves and others from violence?

But the women do not give up. Many continue to fight for their rights. Alone, together, sharing their knowledge, or in organized groups. Women armed only by their courage. They create clandestine schools, health care, shelters against violence, food support. They cultivate secret spaces. They keep the light on in the pitch darkness of the future. They are there, with their peace corps.

BIBLE VERSE

"And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering. Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands...When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels!,,,you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised,..Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry...After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin." (Judges 11:30-39)

COMMENTARY

Several unusual ideas are mixed in the words of Jephthah, leader of Israel: the idea that God could be pleased with a human sacrifice and accept the exchange, blood for blood, and Jephthah's claim to be able to dispose of the lives of those who lived with him. The young woman submits without rebelling. How can you go against God and your father? So the father sheds blood on the battlefield and kills his daughter, justifying everything as God wanted.

PRAYER

God, our Father and Mother, the patriarchy is not dead. Many of Jephthah's daughters are still sacrificed today on the idolatrous altars of male power, attributing to you the will to kill in war as well as at home. Protect all women victims of patriarchal power and renounce, we pray, every word and ideology, which deceives and produces oppression and death. Amen

8 DECEMBER 2024

Gender bias in language, gender bias in society



Nearly 40 years have passed since the “Recommendations for a non-sexist use of the Italian language” written by Alma Sabatini for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the National Commission for Equality. It was 1987. Today, it is still difficult to say “sindaca”, “avvocata” or “ministra”, while one can say “maestra”, “infermiera” and “operaia” without being accused of old-fashioned feminism. There is still a long way to go to overcome sexism in language, in the body, in paid work, in unpaid work, in domestic work, in everyday life, in short in all areas of life and thought. This is why we need to update ourselves and update our tools. Language changes continuously, in step with life, we change with it and it changes with us.

The UN Agenda 2030 calls for gender equality in its goal 5. At what point are we? The ASviS Report says that Italian progress is insufficient, with significant gender inequalities compared to the European average. Linguistic stereotypes, backwardness, asymmetry, obstacles to full female par-

ticipation and representation persist. Having a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) is a first step, but to achieve true gender equality it is necessary for institutions, education and the media to adopt inclusive and respectful linguistic practices.

BIBLE VERSE

“a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,”
(Ecclesiastes 3:7)

COMMENTARY

There is a time for everything, the Bible reminds us. There is also time to tear off what is broken, what has become useless, to sew together a new garment, a new language, a renewed attitude, open to the light. There is a time to remain silent: it means listening, with respect, with attention, with curiosity. It is the time of dialogue, in which we take turns remaining silent and leaving space and time for the other. Finally, Ecclesiastes says, there is a time for speaking. Let us try to speak well, to choose our words carefully, to pay attention to details, to weak signals that become strong: to recognize our sister, our brother. Recognize that inclusive language actually wants to include, remember that we are one, many. It is the added value, the most that speaks of each person in their peculiarity and uniqueness. Even denied speech can be violent.

PRAYER

God, you who are the artist of the Universe, help us understand the right time to be silent and the right time to speak. Help us to remember that “in the beginning was the hokmah”: knowledge, wisdom. Give us the wisdom to use our words well, the courage to name problems, and the creativity to construct solutions. Amen

QUESTION for discussion

Are words important?

9-10

DECEMBER 2024

The importance of language in care relationships



Words have extraordinary power, one word can change a situation, a feeling, our lives. In the care relationship, words and listening are important: empathetic communication can make the difference. The doctor-patient relationship is in fact complex and plays a fundamental role in the diagnosis, treatment of illnesses and general well-being. Regarding women, especially victims of violence, a common commitment is needed on the use and consequences of words. In fact, our language is full of sexist stereotypes that express and legitimize a serious lack of respect towards women. How often do we use negative words or attitudes that make us feel guilty: we focus on how they were dressed, whether they had been drinking, thus insinuating that part of the responsibility lies with women and justifying men who are too often presented with indulgence, even in femicides, using romantic terms: “troppo amore” (too much love), “marito e compagno esemplare” (exemplary husband and partner). In the healthcare sector, the conscious use of words is more necessary than ever; knowing how to immediately offer a correct response is fundamental for the path to escape from violence. We need continuous training for healthcare workers and the presence of psychologists ready to welcome survivors. We need an everyday language that respects equal dignity.

QUESTION for discussion

How can men be active participants in overcoming violence and abuse?

BIBLE VERSE

„Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her.“

(Genesis 34:1-2)

COMMENTARY

What are churches doing to overcome violence and abuse.

The prevention of harassment and abuse in the ecclesiastical environment is crucial. The Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (FCEI), for example, promotes cultural work. The Federation of Evangelical Women in Italy (FDEI) participates in global campaigns such as “Black Thursday” and organizes initiatives against discrimination and gender violence. The Synod of Methodist and Waldensian Churches has approved specific Guidelines for the protection of minors and the prevention of abuse. The Lutheran Evangelical Church in Italy (CELI) has adopted the document “Safe Church” for a protected environment, with the support of professional figures, psychologists and lawyers. At the international level, the World Council of Churches (WCC) adopted a Code of Conduct for its 11th Assembly (Karlsruhe, 2023) addressed to all participants. The Lutheran World Federation (WLF), the Methodist churches of the United Kingdom and the Salvation Army have similar tools to ensure safety and respect in church settings. The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) approved guidelines for the prevention of harassment in 2001, the result of an international collective effort. The Italian approach, although not yet uniform, finds involvement from all denominations. A mapping of the projects on these issues, financed by the Otto per mille of our churches, could offer a more complete overview and allow the sharing of good practices.

PRAYER

Lord, we pray that we may improve our speech. May we be examples with words of care, blessing and protection.
Amen