

Woman, Educator for Peace

Reading the Signs of the Times

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Below are excerpts from a speech entitled, Woman Educator for Peace, given by the author on January 1, 1995, in Trent, Italy, on the World Day of Peace. She emphasized not only the gifts of women in general and that every woman is to be increasingly valued in Church life and society, but also the fundamental relationship of reciprocity between men and women, and with Jesus. Translated from: C. Lubich, Discorsi in ambito civile ed ecclesiale, a cura di V. Araújo, Opere di Chiara Lubich 10, Città Nuova, Roma 2020, pp. 251-258.

For many centuries now women have been asking this very question of themselves as they struggle to be what they are meant to be and reach self-fulfillment.

In recent times they have waged an all-out war in order to have their dignity recognized and to affirm their rights, which all too often have been trampled upon. And though their actions may have perplexed some, they have made progress. Of course, we are no longer in such sad times for women as in the days when Teresa of Avila — “the most saintly of women and the most womanly of saints” — asked the Lord for justice for women. She found it utterly ridiculous that “virtuous and strong hearts be disdained simply because they belonged to women.”¹

Yes, the plight of women in the world has changed significantly and there are many signs that indicate new developments.

In contrast with times past, today there are women who are aware of their identity and who are ready to give their unique and irreplaceable contribution, in solidarity, not only among themselves, but also with men, for the future of our planet. [...]

But we might also ask ourselves: When women have reached all their legitimate goals, will they feel truly fulfilled?

Personally, I believe that something much deeper is needed. [...]

Therefore, women will find their true fulfillment only in Christ, who by redeeming men and women returned all things to their proper order. And it is Christ who gives back the harmony that was lost in their relationship; Christ, who while here on earth, demonstrated a great love for women and thus gave back woman her true dignity. In fact, in all his teachings and all his actions there is not a single sign of the discrimination toward women prevalent in his day. On the contrary, his words and actions always expressed the respect and honor owed to women.²

In order for women to truly be themselves, they need to reconsider where they stand in relation to Jesus. Today too they need to make the experience of a profound encounter with him, to discover him, just as those fortunate women of Palestine did in their day.[...]

He, the son of God-Love, will reveal himself to women as the one who came on earth to live and die out of love and to restore everything and every creature through love. Christ came to teach love to everyone because love is the heart of his doctrine. He came to call each and every person to love: a vocation to which women are particularly inclined.

This does not mean that men are not. History offers countless examples of men who were giants in love, in divine charity. It is just that women are particularly adept in loving. [...]

But where is it possible for women today to encounter Jesus and his message once again?

We all know that the topic of women in today's world is a sign of the times. And this means that it is a sign of God's will. But God, who is Providence, does not limit himself simply to giving signs. He opens the way, gives answers, offers possibilities. And he generally does so, although not exclusively, through his Church.

In fact, the Church, which includes its leaders at the highest levels, has undertaken the task of providing an answer. [...]

But Jesus is not present and does not show his concern for us all – and in particular today, for women – only through the channels of the hierarchy of the Church. He is alive and can be found, for example, in the numerous Orders and Congregations founded in the Church throughout the centuries and renewed and updated after the Second Vatican Council.

He can also be found in the more recent groups, Associations and Movements that have sprung up before, during and after the Second Vatican Council, both in Italy and abroad, all of them an expression of, and a great source of hope for, the Church.

The spiritualities of these new groups in the Church have points in common to which women are particularly sensitive. [...]

Coming into contact with these Movements, as well as with other parts of the renewed Church, women today, of every country and race, can and do discover a Jesus who is alive. And just as in the times when he was physically present, they feel that his love and his message makes them new and whole.

These women can be found everywhere: at home, at work, in schools, in congresses, in theatres, in hospitals, in the structures of the Church....

On the basis of a rediscovered awareness of the equality among men and women and the dignity they both share, also in marriage, they dedicate themselves to ensuring that Jesus is always present in the family. They do this by fostering a spirit of "living one for the other" that is alive and constant among every member of the family. They resolve problems with the peaceful and unifying quality typically theirs, ironing out differences, knowing how to

forgive, and sharing harmoniously tasks and responsibilities, so opening the family to all humanity.

These women also work in all areas of society. Just as in their daily lives they are accustomed to being at the service of others and attentive to those around them, in society they give a new soul to the various forms of public intervention, making structures more human and giving them new vitality. What is more, they dedicate themselves to the most crucial humanitarian issues such as a more equitable distribution of wealth and basic human necessities, international solidarity, and the protection of the environment.

Christ living in them conquers hearts, works conversions, eliminates barriers and brings peace among people of different races and nations, among rich and poor. They work toward bringing greater unity and collaboration among all the members of the Church.

They are also capable of initiating fruitful dialogues with Christians of other Churches, with the faithful of other religions and with people of goodwill.

They understand that the history of humanity is a slow and arduous discovery of universal brotherhood in Christ, and they work to see it fulfilled on all levels.

¹ Saint Teresa of Jesus, *Cammino di perfezione*, 1st Ed., Autografo di El Escorial, 1565: IV, 1.

² Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 13.