



Woman Authentic in Being and Action

By Carol Mechler - Illinois

Woman touched by God, authentic reflection of Mary
Mujer inspirada por Dios, reflejo auténtico de María



PART ONE

In 2020, we will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of women in Schoenstatt. During this centennial year, our Mothers' League wants to proclaim the motto, "**Woman Touched by God, Authentic Reflection of Mary**" weaving it into the motto from the Leaders' Convention, "**United in Mary – on fire we go forward!**".

I visited the Shrine in Waukesha recently and as always looked through the books, and booklets in the gift store to see what was new and to see if there might be something I needed to purchase for myself or for my group members back home. Because I was in the process of writing an article on apostolate of being and acting as it relates to the Mothers' League, I spotted a booklet titled, "**Being a Woman: Me, Here, Now**". It is a talk given by Sister Maria da Graca Sales from the Pontifical Council for the Laity in Rome at the 75th Anniversary Congress of the Schoenstatt Women's League dated September 21, 1995.

Sister Maria da Graca Sales relates what was brewing twenty-five years ago on the world stage about the meaning of being a woman.

Pope St. John Paul II wrote an impassioned *Letter to Women* June 29, 1995 in which he proclaimed that "without the contribution of women, the world will become poorer. Only with the help of women can the face of the earth be changed".(1) He wrote, "I would now like to *speak directly to every woman*, to reflect with her on the problems and the prospects of what it means to be a woman in our time. In particular I wish to consider the essential issue of the *dignity* and *rights* of women, as seen in the light of the word of God." (8)

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in early September of that year. Its agenda was a "Platform of Action" to ensure that a balance is drawn between the status of the sexes on a world level at the turn of the third millennium. (2)

Sister Maria da Graca Sales lists the following proposals of the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing 1995:

In order to ensure that a balance is drawn between the status of the sexes, the word "sex" was replaced by the word "gender" in the new wording of the English draft "Platform for Action" ... In the dictionary of radical North American feminists, the word "sex" means "biological sex"; "gender" in comparison indicates the cultural meaning of the "sex role." The American politician Bella Abuz explains, "The concept "sex role" should express the fact that the role and status of men and women is constructed by a society and therefore interchangeable." That means every woman can be according to her liking feminine or masculine and every man may take on a masculine or feminine sex role... (8)

With this new "Gender Feminism" all chosen gender roles are regarded as having equal rights and status in society. The Beijing Platform for Action apparently wanted to support this approach by using certain terminology formerly unused, for example, free "sexual orientation" and "lifestyle." In the opinion of the so-called Gender Feminists, the traditional biological family in which the mother-role is ascribed to the woman is a place of suppression for her and should be abolished. These tendencies also earned implicit acclaim from the Platform for Action in Beijing when it presented the family under the negative description of "household."

The problem as to whether the bracketed (meaning it would be put up for discussion in Beijing) word "mother" should remain in the text or not, resulted in heated debate even before the World Conference.

A third decisive breach and change of direction became apparent in the inconclusive discussion which preceded the Conference with regard to the omission of any reference in the text to higher or timeless values, to ethics and finally to the meaning of religion in the life of women. Also, in this regard it appeared that the strong lobby of the Gender Feminists seemed to dominate, and effectively reduced woman to a changeable sex role.

In a further application of the gender ideology, which presupposes a specific understanding of the human person, one can read that the Beijing text advocates that women and young girls should be guaranteed "safe sex," "reproduction rights" and "safe abortion" in the area of health care.

The secretary of the conference, Gertrude Mongella, commenting on the proposals of the Action Platform, said at the opening session on 4 September: "The Platform is a document for the world, but for women it is their Document, because it embodies the yearnings, hopes and actions which will guide us into the 21st century." (4)

Sister Maria da Graca Salas adds the following relative to the proposals of the Conference in Beijing: "The final goal of the feminist revolution should be the abolition of sexual difference," maintains Martine Rothblatt. In her most recent manifesto in the United States against the *Apartheid of the Sexes* she contends, "The legal difference

between men and women is as false as that between white and black.” And, “There is no rational argument to divide the human race into two groups of men and women.”

For the Gender Feminists, the aim of the advancement of woman is to make her equal with man, since the difference between them is the reason for the suppression and exploitation of women. The ideal of “Equality for All” would be achieved when each person could choose their own “role” as proposed in Gender Feminism. In the future feminist counter society, the woman will be freed from the “constraint of motherhood” in view of the changeability of gender roles. Through the progress of medical science, the desire to have children can be achieved in a one sex relationship just as undesired children in a heterosexual relationship can be avoided. In such a system father, mother, parents, marriage partners and the traditional family will then logically no longer exist...

Gender Studies are available in bookstores throughout the United States. For the study of Gender Anthropology, universities have their own faculties. In the Philippines a broad-based educational program of gender anthropology for women and girls is being carried out. In Bangalore a group of experts for Women’s Rights and Family Planning advocates: “if such programs for family planning are to be successful in the long term, they must not aim so much at reducing fertility in the framework of existing gender roles, but rather to change the gender roles, so that fertility will be reduced.”

Today in our own context one sees only the tip of the iceberg. For example, isn’t the “unisex mode” an unequivocal product of “gender ideology”? Or attempts to exchange parents’ roles in such a way that younger children don’t notice the “houseman” replacing the “housewife”? (5)

Finally, the demands for the recognition of the *rights* of women within the Church to take on functions reserved for men; in plain words, the demands that women be accepted to the priesthood – take their roots from a functionalistic understanding of the human person, bypassing the role of being, which also characterizes gender anthropology. (6)

Even the most convinced proponents of this new gender role ideology struggle to find their central idea. An initial approach on our part to focus on their central idea fails because this gender anthropology is, so to speak, beyond our comprehension, it is something unheard of for us. Therefore, we must begin by questioning the pre-conditions for the development of such a position. When the Holy Father (Pope St. John Paul II) in his Apostolic Letter *Christifidelis Laici (lay members of Christ’s faithful people)* speaks of people who live as if there were no God, he means the totality of secularization, in which the last trace of a relationship with God has disappeared, or which has never existed. Because the existence of God is no longer a debated issue, the concept disappears that there is an order, binding norms or even a nature which prevents actions according to one’s pleasure or whim.

Our founder (Father Joseph Kentenich) pointed out on many occasions that the image of God and the image of man are interrelated in every age. Changes in the understanding of God and man indicate the beginning of a new time. Our founder would agree when we

conclude that many people who today live as if there is no God, also live without the God-given ideal of manhood and womanhood. A time without an image of God is a time without an image of man and woman and, accordingly, a time when womanhood is totally abandoned to its own and other's arbitrariness. (7)

Sister Maria da Graca Sales concludes:

Jubilee celebrations are hours of thanksgiving, hours of grace and hours of mission. That is how our father and founder would want them to be understood. What he expects of us – exactly at this hour – you may write anew in your hearts today:

“You want to represent the ideal image of the Blessed Mother. Through our entire Women’s Movement, and not least of all, our League members, we want to present the God-willed image of woman to today’s world.”

From the perspective of “Time for Women,” this task widens to world dimensions at the threshold of the third millennium. The *Letter to Women* by the Holy Father of 29 June 1995 may not remain unanswered. Are we not obliged to take up his prayer as a special task?

“May Mary, Queen of Love, watch over women and their mission in service of humanity, of peace, of the spread of God’s kingdom!”

A MOMENT TO REFLECT

Twenty-Five years later we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of women in Schoenstatt and we must sadly admit that the proposals of the Beijing Conference’s Platform of Action of 1995 are indeed becoming part of our culture.

I invite all women of Schoenstatt to read and reflect on the following texts during this centennial year. These texts will help educate us about the recent history of the journey of women seeking acknowledgement, respect, and appreciation in their own special dignity. Our aim is to contribute to continuing this journey as women of Schoenstatt with our motto: Woman Touched by God, Authentic Reflection of Mary.

- Being A Woman: Me, Here, Now (Schoenstatt Gift Store)
- The Great Mary – The Little Mary May 31, 1966 (Schoenstatt Gift Store)
- Pope John Paul II Letter to Women (Vatican Website)
- Pope John Paul II Letter to Mrs. Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Vatican Website)

- (1) **Being A Woman: Me, Here, Now, p. 5**
- (2) **Ibid., p. 7**
- (3) **Ibid., p. 7**
- (4) **Ibid., p. 8**

- (5) **Ibid., p. 9**
- (6) **Ibid., p. 10**
- (7) **Ibid., p. 10-11**
- (8) **Letter to Women, June 29,1995**

PART ONE - QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- 1) Our founder, Father Joseph Kenterich, pointed out on many occasions that the image of God and the image of man are interrelated in every age. He stated that changes in the understanding of God and man indicate the beginning of a new time. Have we entered a new time when the image of man and woman is being separated from the image of God? What does this new time mean for us, our children, our grandchildren, for future generations?
- 2) Our founder said that a time without an image of God is a time without an image of man and woman and, accordingly, a time when womanhood is totally abandoned to its own and other's arbitrariness. Does the Conference of 25 years ago and its Platform of Action confirm Father's statement? How can we safeguard and present the God-willed image of woman to today's world?
- 3) Share examples that you have come across that illustrate that the Platform of Action proposals of the Conference of 25 years ago are taking hold in our culture today.

Something to think about:

The New York Times, September 25, 2019 - Mattel, the company that conquered the doll world by dividing it into idealized Barbies and Kens, is introducing a new line of gender-neutral dolls for boys, girls and **children in between**. The new line, introduced on Wednesday and called [Creatable World](#), is intended to reflect our culture "as the world continues to **celebrate the positive impact of inclusivity**," said Kim Culmone, the Mattel executive who led the team that designed the new dolls.

CONTINUATION WITH PART TWO