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WOMEN AND WORK: WIDE-SPREAD AND HIDDEN VIOLENCE

16 days to overcome violence

From 25 November to 10 December 2023

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Introduction

"The purpose of this Convention is to:

- to protect women from all forms of violence and to prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence;
- to contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and to promote concrete equality between the sexes, which includes strengthening women's autonomy and self-determination."

(from the European Council Convention on prevention and fight against violence on women and domestic violence, Article 1, Istanbul 2011, Italy joined it with Law 119 - 2013)

It is now a well-established fact: gender inequality also affects the wallet!

Women have a lower employment rate than men at a European level and in Italy the gap is among the highest, although since 2021 there has been a steady increase in employed women and in the second quarter of 2023 Istat informs that it went from 51.3% in 2022 to 52.6%.

Yet if we look at the female employment level, according to Eurostat data from 2022, the average European pay gap between men and women per hour worked is 14.1%, but in 2022 Italy was 13.8 points below the European average. Furthermore, again in our country, after the birth of a child many women easily leave or lose their job: only 43.6% return to work, while in the South and the Islands the figure drops to 29%.

But why focus on issues related to the world of

work? To what extent can they be linked to violence against women? The gender pay gap and other discriminations related to the world of work promote conditions of economic and psychological subjection that leave many women stuck in relationships with manipulative, possessive and violent men. The XXIII Congress of the FDEI, held last March, in relation to the current working system which alienates, exploits and creates precariousness, highlighted that: "...all this affects women the most, exposing them in many cases to a perBIBLE VERSE situation in which economic dependence, wage inequality, sexual blackmail and denied motherhood are combined."

Faced with this situation, it is necessary to intervene (here the conditional is a must!) with urgency and force, everyone doing their part: politics and governments with appropriate legislative provisions and the financial coverage to implement them; training agencies and civil society as a whole, committing themselves on the cultural side to undermine prejudicial and discriminatory languages and attitudes from which violence against women draws its strength and substance.

We evangelical women continue to offer our contribution of analysis and reflection, also through the composition of these 16 days: a collective work done with competence and passion to break down gender stereotypes, to cultivate a culture of equality and parity, affirming with conviction that a different way of relating between human beings and with creation as a whole can not only exist, but it is necessary; and this is what we are called to do as believers if we want to follow Jesus Christ.

Mirella Manocchio
FDEI President

25

NOVEMBER 2023

Femicides on top of a submerged iceberg



On this day we cannot help but talk about femicides and violence against women even if this issue aims to examine the topic of women and work in its various aspects.

This summer the media focused on femicides and rapes (including gang rapes) so much so as to make people think that these are a new problem that needed to be responded to in a safe way; there was talk of confused and aggressive teenagers, of girls “who get away with it” using alcohol and drugs.

In reality, the issue of gender-based violence, which now also affects LGBTQ A realities, is a systemic and cultural problem that is not new and must be addressed differently.

Let's see: at the beginning of October this year we already had 86 femicides but, for example, last year there were 123 femicides. And more or less these numbers have been repeated for years and show no signs of decreasing. They are just the tip of the iceberg of gender-based violence.

ISTAT tells us that in the last five years the number of women who have suffered at least one form of physical or sexual violence amounts to 2 million 435 thousand, 11.3% of women aged 16 to 70; women who have suffered rape or attempted rape are 246 thousand (1.2%). Violence lurks mainly in relationships, especially in relationships with an ex-partner.

These numbers can only change with coordinated networking, with judicial interven-

tion that criminal judgment is considered in the decisions of civil courts (child custody), prevention, in schools, intervening on the culture of violent males, promoting correct information in the media, to remove a well-rooted patriarchal culture. The Istanbul Convention (which is not often mentioned) reminds us of this.

BIBLE VERSE

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5,1)

COMMENTARY

The freedom of Christ does not stop on the surface, it goes deep. “What is essential is invisible to the eye”. Saint-Exupéry, driven by his passion for freedom, wants to say that with the intelligent gaze of the heart we must go beyond appearances to identify the knots that suffocate freedom and to develop a widespread education in feelings. In this it is possible to discern in relational dynamics what hurts and what heals. An accurate analysis is vital to understand the seriousness of the violence that violates women's freedom. The need arises to weave a prevention, information and treatment network. Prevention is achieved when the male is made to understand that her identity cannot be built on domination over the woman. A woman's decisions should not be considered as a subtraction of her power, but as the fruit of an inviolable freedom. Serious information becomes available when public and private institutions, churches and the mass media contribute to dismantling the paradigm of male possession that nests in the relational folds of society. The cure becomes just a plaster until the distorted imagination of the woman-man relationship is looked at in depth and healed

PRAYER

O God we are grateful for the freedom you offer us in Christ, thanks to which we understand that there is no true female freedom until our society stops on the surface and does not undermine the demon that lurks in the secular encrustations that suffocate instead of freeing.

QUESTION to discuss

How to free men (and women) from the cage of patriarchy that enslaves them?

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NOVEMBER 2023

In (precarious) balance between home and work



Photo Gerd Altmann

The Women's work outside the house, in addition to being an important element of women's emancipation, has become increasingly indispensable to the ménage of families. And it is women who suffer the most in the attempt to reconcile work and home life. In fact, we are so used to living in a multi-tasking way that we no longer notice it!

We get up early, get the kids up and ready for school; we rush to work with the shopping to do in mind, the dentist to book, the son's English school and so on until late in the evening. And then there's the phone call to the mother and verifying that the caregiver gives her the medicine every day...It is estimated that women in the age group between 25 and 44 dedicate 3 hours and 25 minutes a day to domestic work, compared to 1 hour and 22 minutes for men. Percentages that then increase with the birth of children.

Today 51.0% of women are employed, compared to 69.7% of men (Istat) but these percentages change for women with children: after the birth of a child, almost 1 in 5 women (18%) no longer work and only 43.6% remain employed (29% in the South). The prevailing reason is the difficulty in reconciling work and care (52%), followed by non-renewal of the contract or termination (29%) (Inapp data). This penalization of female double work (which also affects the birth rate) should be addressed, above all, not only by increasing the public services offered to new mothers, but also by increasing the protection of the rights of working mothers who are the first victims of mobbing, bossing, and therefore resignation and/or termination.

BIBLE VERSE

... in her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. (Proverbs 31, 19-20)

COMMENTARY

The last chapter of the book of Proverbs contains the "sayings of King Lemuel, an inspired utterance his mother taught him". The mention of the king's mother emphasizes the feminine approach on the topic that we will find in the rest of the chapter and reminds us that we are not reading the theories of a philosopher, but the advice of a mom who is deeply interested on the wellbeing and the happiness of her son; the chapter does not present a detached philosophy but offers a more profound and intimate exhortation. The "virtuous woman" portrayed from v. 10 is the description of the ideal woman that a mom has in mind for her son.

Among the many characteristics of the virtuous woman, we want to highlight only three aspects: domestic work, non-domestic work, attention, and care toward her neighbor.

In the whole chapter we can find many references to manual labour, and to its results. The virtuous woman is a person that gets herself busy, she would work not only for herself: the same hands that work on the spindle, are extended to help whoever is in need.

Now, we may read this text in one or two ways: the first perspective, the more harmful, is the one based on comparison: a woman reader, comparing herself to the idealized virtuous woman, will find herself lacking of some aspects; the man reader will easily start to point finger against the women in his life, complaining that they are not enough. The second approach, instead, is more focused on the tone of praise and eulogy, and points to the beauty of it. The biblical author does not mean to diminish the work of the woman in order to uplift himself; every action listed in the chapter is not a "duty" that the virtuous woman is supposed to do. Word after word, this bible text, recognizes and exalts the entrepreneurship of the woman, inside and outside the domestic area

PRAYER

Lord, help us – personally and as a society – to learn and rediscover that second perspective.

QUESTION to discuss

How to talk about division of housework in the family and create solidarity in the workplace?

27

NOVEMBER 2023

Motherhood: private matter or social value?



THE LAST WILL BE THE LAST

directed by **Massimiliano Bruno**, 2015.

A pregnant woman who remains unemployed for this reason.

Motherhood has been a purely female “problem” for centuries! He was about the pregnant woman and the women in her family! Assistance at birth was the role of the midwife! It is only with industrialization and the entry of women into the “job market” that motherhood becomes a social problem, because the “cost” of motherhood is also passed on to employers. It is in this historical period that the awareness that motherhood has a social value first grows in civil society, then it is claimed in trade union negotiations and in workplaces.

It is society as a whole that is enriched by a new human being; it’s not a private matter! It is therefore right that society as a whole values and takes charge of this event!

It is on this ethical-cultural terrain that, after months of struggles in the workplace, the law for the protection of working mothers, one of the best laws in Europe, was won.

Now, in a period of ethical-social “fatigue”, when hiring female staff, the request by employers to sign a letter of “voluntary” resignation in case they become pregnant is back again!!

It is a way to avoid applying the law of “Protection of working mothers”. Motherhood thus returns to being a private matter, denying the value of motherhood for the whole COMMUNITY!!

BIBLE VERSE

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children[a] by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

“And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. (Genesis 16,1-2,4a)

COMMENTARY

An ancient text that nevertheless deals with a current theme. The leader of a nomadic tribe, Abraham has no children. He had grown old without heirs, so the tribe wondered who would succeed him. It is Sarai, his wife, who makes the difficult decision. To avoid breaking the cohesion of the tribe, Sarai seems to have no alternative: so she instructs the servant Hagar to sleep with her husband Abraham. According to the legal conception of the time, the son who would be born would become hers and the new undisputed leader of the entire tribe upon Abraham’s death. The fact that the story continued differently does not matter in this case. A private decision would have consequences for everyone.

PRAYER

God, the solid ground of our lives. Life is often not easy, because it is a coexistence with others. There are rules, desires, needs, points of view. Help us find our place. We recognise the contribution we can make to common needs as a support. That the community doesn’t demand too much from us individually. Amen

THEY COLLABORATED IN THE CREATION OF THIS NOTEBOOK:

The following have collaborated in the creation of this journal: Gabriele Bertin, Daniele Campoli, Frida Casaretto, Barbara Olivieri Caviglia, Gabriella Ciampi, Kassin Conteh, Nicolò D’Elia, Daniela Di Carlo, Carsten Gerdes, Ioana Ghilvaciu, Doriana Giudici, Simone De Giuseppe, Lidia La Montanara, Gabriela Lio, Virginia Longo, Daniela Lucci, Mirella Manocchio, Elena Ribet, Gabriella Rustici, Gianna Urizio, Renate Zwick. Edited by Gabriela Lio and Gianna Urizio.

Also this year the journal was translated into English by Annie Marcelo, into German by the Lutheran Women’s Network, into French by Melisenda du Fournet and into Spanish by Claudia Florentin and Myriam Sappè. Our thanks go to all of them for this important work. A special thanks to Pietro Romeo for the layout and graphics.

QUESTION to discuss

How much did deciding to become a mother influence your professional future? Have you lost or given up your job?

28 NOVEMBER 2023

Unacceptable violence and harassment in the workplace



NOME DI DONNA

directed by **Marco Tullio Giordana**, 2018.

A film that talks about sexual harassment in the workplace and the loneliness in which those who do not intend to submit find themselves.

In 2021, INAIL released data on the phenomenon of violence against women in the workplace: 1,404,000 women between the ages of 15 and 65 said they had suffered physical harassment or sexual blackmail in the workplace by employers, bosses or colleagues.

This is a huge figure that transforms this hateful phenomenon into an endemic, violent phenomenon, based on the belief of impunity of employers, bosses or colleagues. It is an impunity that becomes a right and that authorizes men to exercise violence on women as masters, bosses or even men.

But what kind of violence is this? First of all, it is verbal violence with the aim of damaging the dignity and safety of women. It can be expressed in outbursts of anger, accusations, blaming the other person, humiliating and vulgar judgments and criticisms aimed at belittling the dignity of women, or referring to weaknesses (e.g. a physical defect) or sensitive personal conditions. All of this is also psychological violence which includes unwanted comments or sexual advances, which cause deep anxiety, discomfort and insecurity in workers. The tip of the iceberg is the actual sexual violence which ranges from harassment and groping to forced non-consensual sexual intercourse.

Unfortunately, too often this violence is endured in silence by women who experience the blackmail of dismissal or the fear of not finding another job. This context of violence should also be debated in the public space to combat it.

BIBLE VERSE

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?...Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof...For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

(Habakkuk 1,2; 12-13 & 2,14)

COMMENTARY

Violence is usually understood as behavior that humiliates or embarrasses a person, especially the woman. Improper appreciation and verbal aggression in the workplace are indeed insults or threats; a woman should not be forced to suffer the consequences. Violence in all its forms affects the self-esteem of the person who suffers it.

When we learn that someone is using any form of violence against a woman, we cannot remain silent because God urges us to be the voice of the voiceless and to fight all forms of violence. Each of us should contribute to the elimination of all forms of violence from the earth, and "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters themselves cover the sea".

PRAYER

O Lord, we are aware that even today there are women who suffer violence and this mistreatment is a cowardice and a degradation for all humanity. We pray for the victims because we have the courage to break the silence, we cannot ignore them and look the other way. We pray that these victims will be protected by society and their suffering will be heard by all.

QUESTION to discuss

How to defend yourself from harassment at work? How to report?

29

NOVEMBER 2023

Women and work: many obstacles to achieving equality



FREE TO ... LIVE,

docufilm directed by **Antonio Silvestre** for Global Thinking Foundation, 2022.

Through real testimonies, gender-based economic violence and its devastating consequences are addressed.

In this period, after the heavy attack on the Maternity Law, we are witnessing a serious attack on the dignity and rights of workers in the workplace, Equal pay for men and women is denied for the same work done.

The woman's paycheck is "lighter" than that of her male colleague!! There are many ways to achieve this goal: request for overtime (but women find it difficult to do so due to family commitments), an obligation to follow retraining or refresher courses, often outside working hours, in order to be able to move on to a higher qualification.

But there is also a historical-cultural "dragging": too often the tasks traditionally performed by women are paid less than traditionally male jobs.

One example?? Female garment workers have lower wages than steelworkers!!!

Being a woman in the workplace still means paying "a price to a widespread misogynistic culture that considers women not as subjects who have the right to work and fair remuneration but too often as "backup lung" of the workforce.

BIBLE VERSE

To the woman he said, "I will make your

pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (Genesis 3,16)

COMMENTARY

In the garden of Eden we witness the scene in which the man, questioned by God about his transgression, shifts the blame onto the woman. And Eve, the moment her act of disobedience is denounced, begins the long line of women who are blamed as such. A line that runs through human history and that still grows in our days, or rather continues to grow, without giving any sign of a possible change in the place of men and women in the world. There is still no sign of the desire to change our patriarchal society, which is still very far away and yet so close to the days of Adam and Eve. There are no stable signs of a cultural change that recognizes and practices genuine equal rights and equal employment opportunities for all human beings and is not marked by gender-based violence in addition to economic violence. A society that is not limited to the declination of genders in terms of man - woman, but a renewed society in which all of us - human creatures loved by God - have the right to live the breath of life as a blessing because our bodies, so fragile and at the same time strong, were freed from all sin by Jesus Christ on the cross.

PRAYER

Lord, you know everything about us. Turn your loving gaze to our society so that it may rediscover within itself a pure heart and a steadfast and renewed spirit.

QUESTION to discuss

Do you have a lower salary or position than your colleagues who do the same job as you

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NOVEMBER 2023

Mobbing - when work becomes torture



I LIKE WORKING

directed by **Francesca Comencini** 2004.

A woman always on the verge of giving in but ready to react while her dignity and hopes are taken away.

In the general worsening of current working conditions, one of the most treacherous and devastating factors is mobbing, a phenomenon that wears out, with various and profound consequences, both somatic and psychological.

Out of 21 million employees, about one and a half million Italian workers are victims of bullying. The phenomenon is more prevalent in the North (65%) and affects women more (52%). For women, motherhood is often an opportunity to enter this tunnel from which it is difficult to get out, also because in addition to being acted upon from above, vertical mobbing, it is also acted by side-mobbers, colleagues who participate in mobbing acted from above, but also by spectators who watch without intervening.

In fact, this phenomenon breaks the solidarity between workers, causes depression, anxiety, panic attacks as well as economic damage to the person being mobbed who often finds no solutions other than dismissal.

Speaking with a lawyer from a workers' defense desk of a trade union in Rome, it emerged that 80% of the women who turned to it had problems with bullying; they were desperate women, in need of protection, advice, support, suggestions, in search of a solution that was often impossible. Women who are experiencing a moment of great confusion, who cannot leave their jobs because it is the only source of livelihood for their children.

But the most serious fact is that there is no law on mobbing. In legal cases, even in the presence of documentary evidence and testimony, the judge is forced to issue sentences by analogy with other crimes provided for by the Civil or Criminal Code.

BIBLE VERSE

Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her. (Mark 14,9)

COMMENTARY

In Bethany, at the house of a certain Simon, a woman bursts in and enters the exclusive space of men, with an expensive perfume she anoints the head of Jesus. She was supposed to be with the other women, but the freedom given by Jesus gives her the courage to step outside the boundaries established by the world of men and take on a meaningful role. Among all the disciples, only one woman understands Jesus and the approach of his passion. The men's mobbing reaction does not take long: they murmur among themselves and form a coalition, belittle the gesture, judge it illogical for the alleged "waste". Strategies of mobbing towards women that still proliferate today, especially in the world of work. Jesus' words are chilling because he never said anything like this about any act performed by his disciples. The announcement of his Gospel will always be linked to the memory of this woman in particular and of all women in general. As if to say, there is no Gospel of Jesus if there is no memory of the woman.

PRAYER

Let us pray with the gospel song that says: "Your glorious cause (God) engages our hearts. May Jesus Christ be known, wherever we are. The cross has saved us, so we pray: give us your strength, Oh God, Let your will be done, Let your kingdom come.

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QUESTION to discuss

Have you met anyone who has suffered mobbing? How did you help her?

1 DECEMBER 2023 -GIORNATA MONDIALE PER LA LOTTA CONTRO L'AIDS

Unfair dismissal



INVISIBLE STIGMA

directed by **Alessandro Carlozzo** and **Luca Cepparo**.

docuseries that collects the testimonies of those living with HIV (on Discovery)

Since the adoption by governments of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, promises to improve the lives of women and girls and protect them in a state of vulnerability have not been respected and kept.

The report “We’ve got the power. Women, Girls and the Fight against HIV” informs that AIDS is still the leading cause of death for women between 15 and 49 years old and that about 6000 young women between 15 and 24 years old are infected with HIV every week worldwide.

The LILA association denounces that women are more discriminated against than men in the workplace because of HIV and that, when employers discover their disease, actions are taken against them such as salary reduction, career freeze, transfers to other departments or units so that they are forced to leave. The employer’s violation of Article 5 of Law No. 135/1990, which provides that “no one may be subjected, without their consent, to tests aimed at ascertaining HIV infection, except for reasons of clinical necessity and in their own interest”, has a negative impact on women, harm and discriminate against women living with HIV: studies indicate that many people delay HIV testing because they fear that their results will be revealed and then used as an excuse to transfer, fire, or exclude them from the

workforce. This can create a vicious circle that leads to social exclusion and marginalisation of women living with HIV and harming their dignity.

BIBLE VERSE

There some people brought to him a man who was deaf... After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”). (Mark 7,31-37)

COMMENTARY

One of our greatest temptations is to label in order to differentiate, to divide and separate. In this deaf man we have the elements that can serve us to build on him the discrimination that allows us to become God’s owners, deaf to his call to inclusion and to a Church without walls. But the illusion of classifying and excluding is destroyed by God’s creative action.

Jesus touches with his hands and touches with his saliva, which is the concentrated breath of God who puts people back in the place of the dignity stolen by our prejudices, recognizing their dignity and humanity.

Ephphatha! Jesus’ actions are also addressed to those who are on the other side of the sea, to those who feel “normal”, to those who look down on “the vulnerable” of this shore.

Open! Because only with the full acceptance of vulnerable people will Jesus return to this shore of the sea.

PRAYER

Help us, O Lord, so that our energy and imagination may be at the service of building a world and a church where all men and women have their place of dignity so that together we can leave behind prejudices, discrimination and fears.

Aware that our action, today as yesterday, continues to be to silently cry out your unconditional love and be that new space of justice and dignity.

QUESTION to discuss

How to address or talk about an HIV-positive person without stigmatizing them?

2 DECEMBER 2023

Violence undermines women's health



Photo Stefania Prandi

In the short and long term, violence causes so much damage to women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health that can reverberate throughout their lives.

Women who suffer violence often suffer physical disorders related to chronic stress such as migraines, back pain, gastrointestinal disorders, abdominal pain, up to the onset of cardiovascular disorders when they do not then incur gynecological problems: infections of sexual origin, up to unwanted pregnancies.

On a psychological level, we find a higher incidence of depression, anxiety and post traumatic stress, insomnia, eating disorders, difficulty concentrating, memory loss and, in the most serious forms, self-harming behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse up to suicide in the most extreme cases.

Violence against women is a health problem that affects all countries in the world, and is one of the main risk factors for poor health and premature death for women and girls.

It is therefore essential that health personnel are trained to welcome women who suffer violence (both physical and psychological), know how to identify the symptoms and physical consequences of such violence and do not blame them. In fact, too often women who already blame themselves and are ashamed of the violence they have suffered, due to wrong attitudes, are unable to find the strength to get out of this situation.

BIBLE VERSE

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. (1 Corinthians 11, 7-10)

COMMENTARY

"It's better if you wear a skirt and heels to come to the office." More than one woman will have received such an invitation in her lifetime. On the other hand, even in the workplace the male gaze wants its part. A violent, superficial, reductive look that shapes women according to their own stereotypes, to the point of suggesting how to dress. A look that on the other hand generates embarrassment, inadequacy and discomfort, especially when the gaze comes from one's boss, the person who has decision-making power over one's future career. It is precisely this dominant male gaze, contained in the Pauline letter, that allows or justifies his authority over women, imposing on them what to put on their heads in church. Instead, every person is asked to rediscover the image of God not only in himself, but in the reciprocity of the human being, created male and female, and in the exercise of a shared power that gives freedom and dignity.

PRAYER

Lord, I pray that no physical and psychological violence against women goes unnoticed or silenced. Please give us the strength and courage to report any violence we become aware of. May your loving gaze give strength and dignity to women and transform the perpetrators of violence. Amen.

QUESTION to discuss

Have you ever thought that violence also damages women's physical and mental health?

3 DECEMBER 2023

Pastors in the church: where do we stand?



In a recent article, Baptist pastor Elisabeth Green said that she did not find any kind of discrimination because of her gender in the local communities in which she served, even in some cases a woman Pastor was a sort of pride that denoted a Christianity in step with the times and a fidelity to a certain vision of the Gospel. So, Green herself asks, why is it that, in the context in which she had served, the number of female pastors is still much lower than that of their male colleagues and, in recent times, most of the people who leave the pastorate are women? And above all, why is no one talking about it? Is it because it would mean that ecclesial structures would finally accept women's demands and adopt policies capable of putting an end to male domination? Even today, it can be difficult for women to assert their voice and presence in institutional environments.

In fact, it is not uncommon for men to support each other in business meetings but remain silent when a colleague speaks, or they insist on wanting to explain things to women even though the latter know more than they do. Women and ministry, an uphill road then?

Certainly, but also an opportunity for women pastors to become aware of how much we need each other, authentic relationships that unite them, also flanked by men who are aware of their gender bias. Let's talk about it.*

*Inspired by Pastor E. Green's reflections in

the book Leadership Religiose: la parola alle donne. Sette testimonianze, by Marinella Peroni, Carocci editore Sfere, 2023, €13, pp. 50-53.

BIBLE VERSE

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave[a] nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3, 28)

COMMENTARY

In this letter, Paul presents his theological thought in response to and to the aid of the members of the community of Galatia who were victims of "false teachings" by some missionaries, who were still grounded in tradition. The apostle underlines how in Jesus Christ there was a break with the past and a new time governed by the Spirit began.

The believer, therefore, in this new era, is no longer subject to the law – which moreover condemned him – but is directly connected to God through Christ, who makes him a son. Therefore, when an individual's life is marked by Christ, everything that differentiates us disappears: our past, our ethnic identity, our social position, our gender... It is not a question of cancelling diversity, but of making it legitimate. Because before God and within the church - in communion in Christ - there is no room for exclusion: we are all one. This unity must therefore also be reflected in our relationship with one another, and each and every one has the right to enjoy the same privileges as all others.

QUESTION to discuss

Do you believe that the gospel must be freed from the remnants of male domination?

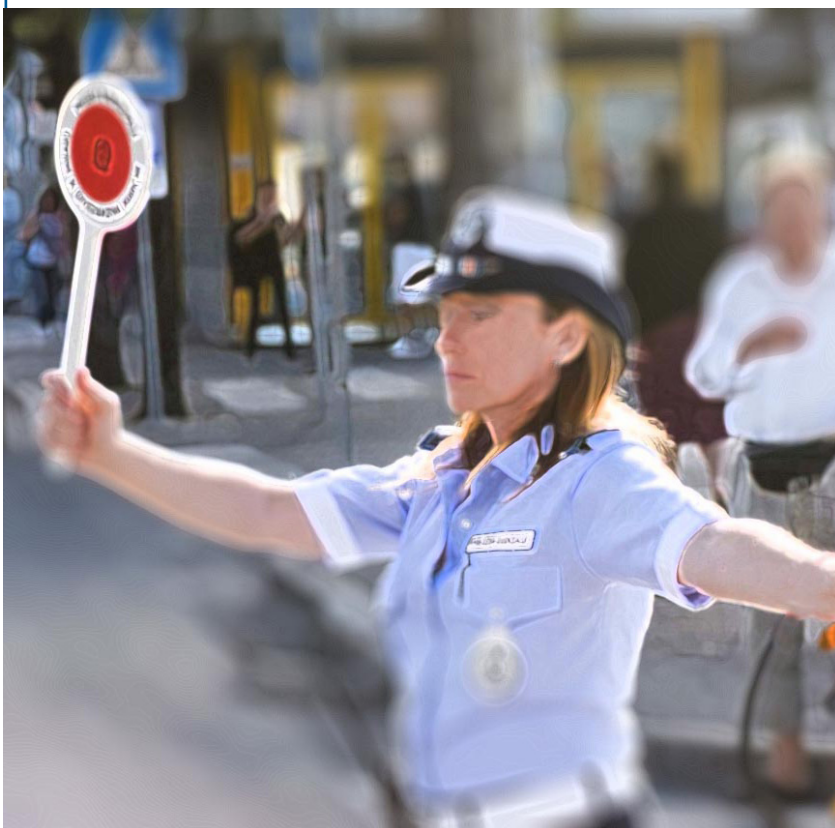
PRAYER

Lord, enlighten and guide us so that we may realize the barriers of exclusion that still exist within our communities.

Help us to have the strength and courage to act in order to eliminate them. Amen.

4 DECEMBER 2023

Violence against women in the armed forces



Female voluntary military service was established in 1999. The arrival of the first women was immediately accompanied by the need for protection against gender discrimination in the Armed Forces, an area predominantly dominated by men, which produces a phenomenon of gender abuse, including emotional abuse, sexual abuse and stalking.

Women often receive unwanted attention from their colleagues and superiors. Adding to the risk of unwanted attention is the fact that she is clearly outnumbered by her male colleagues, which makes her more vulnerable.

Already in 1988 an investigation had been launched following the complaints made by a large number of volunteers, which later led to the birth of two bills on [...] sexual crimes, violence and threats in the Armed Forces, which are still not respected.

It is necessary to include in the Military Penal Code, as stated by Saveria Mobrice, “crimes such as sexual harassment, stalking, sexual violence, etc.” Since, as Sara Ronconi reported, “the internal rules protect the aggressors more than the victims” and “at least

one woman in ten has suffered stalking, harassment and violence in the barracks”, in profound silence like the young woman whose malaise and violence she suffered, who like many others she is afraid to report because she cannot afford to lose her job.

BIBLE VERSE

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40, 30-31)

COMMENTARY

This BIBLE VERSE comes to mind when I think of the gender difficulties encountered by women who decide to work in the various military corps, including the municipal police. It is a BIBLE VERSE quoted by my dear friend and sister in faith - she is currently employed in the Municipal Police - which gives her strength to face forcefully the hardships that as a woman she has to face in her daily work. After her efforts to join the police force, she confessed to me how difficult and at times humiliating it is to feel constantly verbally harassed by sexist comments and jokes from colleagues and citizens she meets on a daily basis. This forces her to make choices that minimize her perception as a woman, such as dressing in a more comfortable uniform or pretending not to hear words or insults. It is her faith that helps her manage everything and in moments of discouragement this is the text that helps her move forward. Women like Anna want to fly high and they know that only thanks to God's strength can they get back up and not let anyone make them give up their dreams.

PRAYER

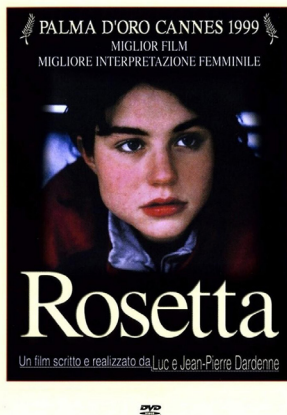
Lord, accompany all women in their desire to live with dignity and respect whatever job they decide to do. Give them strength and make us, all of us, attentive and supportive of their efforts to

QUESTION to discuss

What steps can be taken to be able to discuss the abusive attitudes of many men?

5 DECEMBER 2023

The black hole of social cooperatives



ROSETTA

directed by **Jean-Pierre, Luz Dardenne**, 1999.

A film that, in addition to creating a movement, led to the law on young women's employment in Belgium.

In the vast phenomenon of precariousness that particularly affects women's work, which includes fixed-term contracts, under-classifications and under-wages, a phenomenon that is less analyzed in statistical terms is the job in cooperatives for female workers, in particular those of the so-called third sector.

The problem emerged thanks to the struggles that workers in social cooperatives have undertaken in recent months, revealing some hidden aspects of an increasingly larger sector, the so-called non-profit, which is mistakenly considered marginal compared to traditionally stronger and more unionized sectors. In social cooperatives there are about 170,000 operators, mostly women, who deal with assistance to the elderly and disabled, social hardship, school integration and much more. The development of social cooperatives and non-profit organizations in general is supported by many as the solution to maintain, if not even improve, the levels of social and healthcare assistance in a context characterized by continuous and repeated cuts in social spending in the face of an increase in the demand for assistance; Even the development of the sector is promoted as an alternative to further processes of dismantling and pure and simple privatisation. It is a mystification of reality, denounced by various entities (Legacoop, Confcooperative and AGCI) that denounce the myth of self-management which has no confirma-

tion in reality but is a tool to hide conspicuous under-wages and fixed-term hiring. The time has come to reveal this hidden form of exploitation in order to change it.

BIBLE VERSE

As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die. (I Kings 17, 12-13)

COMMENTARY

In ancient societies, the symbol of the precariousness of life is the widow, because without her husband she remained unprotected. In this story of the widow of Zarephath, precariousness is certainty: we will die. The woman's calmness in the face of her fate comes after disappointments and false hopes. The encounter with Elijah changes the destiny of both. God is involved: he commanded the prophet to ask, the woman to give. Those calm gestures of the woman could be the last, but they will be repeated again. Day after day there will be a drizzle of oil and a handful of flour. God did not make them find a storehouse of goods, the miracle is the gift of one day after another. The solidarity between the two, their working hands under God's gaze, allow life. Between accumulation and precariousness, there is room for tomorrow.

PRAYER

Lord, you know our concern for an increasingly uncertain future. Help us, as you did with the widow of Zarephath, to have trust and solidarity in the face of the unknown. Trust and solidarity is what we need to break the chains of precariousness, we must be in solidarity with others to change a future together in search of a more just and supportive society

QUESTION to discuss

How can we promote trust and solidarity in our workplaces?

6 DECEMBER 2023

The dark life of care givers and housekeepers



Photo Stefania Prandi

About 1 million Italian families have signed a contract with care givers or housekeepers, mostly women and foreigners. Various reports speak of abuse, verbal, physical and sexual violence, human rights violations and undeclared work. Sometimes, the same families or the people cared for mistreat those who are (under) paid to do a job that few people would do. Sometimes, care givers and housekeepers are reported, fired or harassed. Why?

The domestic dimension is perceived as strictly private. What happens inside a house, once the door is closed, remains in the dark. The chores and hardships, the failure to respect rest periods and days off, the possibility of building an independent family, relationships, training remain in the dark. In the dark there is also security and mutual trust, as well as the due recognition of a substantial profession in the lives of many people and families.

For years there has been talk of an international regulatory framework on domestic work and protection tools. One of these, the Convention on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment at Work. As long as there is no fair economic and social recognition of domestic and care work, violence and discrimination will continue, especially against women and migrants. It is an issue that concerns both the private and public spheres. Mean-

while, the Flow Decree established 4 December as “click day” for the hiring of non-EU staff for domestic work, with figures far from the real needs in our country.

BIBLE VERSE

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress my God, in whom I trust.” Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and you will find refuge under his wings; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. (Psalm 91,1-4)

COMMENTARY

The psalms are biblical words that go deep within us, sometimes they are of praise, others of comfort, sometimes of lament. Strong words that give the possibility to express our feelings in moments of joy or anguish, of certainty or pain. The psalms tell a piece of the history of the people of Israel, but they also offer the opportunity for individual introspection. This psalm highlights the faithfulness of the Almighty towards those who evoke him and the text focuses on a profound idea: God protects all those who trust in his benevolence. He does not give the guarantee of a life without suffering and oppression, but we can find, even in the darkest moments of our lives, comfort and strength of mind to face them.

PRAYER

God, source and light of our life, when I think of rapes, of humiliated and exploited women, I just want to cry or be furious. Where is the beauty in this world where brute force and contempt for life prevail? I’m sure of it: this is not how you imagined men.

Today, perhaps, you too cry together with your creatures or are irritated: stay next to us and give us strength and love because we don’t want to stop fighting for a different world, where there is respect for your creatures. Amen

QUESTION to discuss

For how many euros/hour would you be available to clean someone else’s house or look after a not self-sufficient person?

7 DECEMBER 2023

Silence on workers



Photo Ilenta Caffarelli

There is an investigative book on the condition of women who work in the fields every day, for a few euros an hour, forced to work exhausting shifts, for a starvation wage. Female laborers earn much less than men. The survey was carried out in Italy, Spain and Morocco. The author deals not only with women but also with trade unions and associations. Romanian, Bulgarian, Polish, Moroccan, Spanish and Italian women laborers are blackmailed, suffer verbal and physical violence, and are sexually harassed, as evidenced by the high number of abortions in the Vittoria area (Ragusa) during the harvest months. Violence that is too often silenced; few are able to denounce and many go unpunished, including their employers.

Regarding sexual violence in exchange for work, Stefania Prandi states that “it is an unwritten, underlying rule, a taboo, a reiterated and silenced reality, before everyone’s eyes, passed off as normal”. They are single mothers or with distant husbands, sons and daughters who stay at home with their grandmothers or aunts. The institutions, the politicians, the community are aware of what is happening but no one is doing anything simply so as not to put the agri-food industry and the commercial chain of our and other European

countries in difficulty. Tomatoes, strawberries, blueberries and raspberries are grown in greenhouses, harvested by these women and packaged to arrive on our tables.

BIBLE VERSE

But if out in the country a man happens to meet a young woman pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. Do nothing to the woman; (...) for the man found the young woman out in the country, and though the betrothed woman screamed, there was no one to rescue her. (Deuteronomy 22, 23-27)

COMMENTARY

There is no mention of male workers, and especially of female workers.. But the text tells of violence. Violence in an open, public, but also isolated space. Place where cries for help reverberate in the void of indifference. Such as tomato plantations or grape sheds. Places of passage along our highways, ignored in the content. Violence gives rise to more violence, as if it could make reparation for the evil suffered, and men are entrusted with the task of repairing their honor. Women, both free and working, remain isolated, in silent places, full of violence. Open spaces but closed in slavery, where neither human nor divine law can reach.

PRAYER

Lord, may your Spirit blow into the places of forgetfulness. In the fields of slave labor, daily violence and unheard voices. That working can be a space for life and solidarity: an antidote to the violence of the world, and not its silent accomplice. To you we entrust the workers, the rebels and the silent, those who do not bend and those who are tired, so that in you they may find energy, hope and denunciation. In Jesus Christ, who made the peripheral and central workplaces the space in which to encounter human frailty in order to give it new fullness.

QUESTION to discuss

How many realities of exploitation and abuse of women are there that we do not see?

8 DECEMBER 2023

Feminism is for everybody



ME TOO

directed by **Maria Schrader**, 2023

#MeToo, the feminist movement that broke the silence on sexual abuse.

BIBLE VERSE

Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace. (Psalm 144,12)

COMMENTARY

The world can become a better place only if women and men know how to build the necessary friendship between themselves to change the world. The psalmist is clear, the blessing of God's people needs a good land, to feel the presence of God to which he will respond with choral singing.

And in the midst of this dialogue of love between God and human history, represented by the Psalms, just as God bends the sky to descend and touch the mountains and meet the sons who grow like plants filled with the gift of youth and the daughters filled with the gift of strength, so abundant as to sustain the palaces, we discover a future full of blessings for that people whose God is rock and fortress, liberation and refuge. Sons and daughters must walk together. The pace must be measured, the eyes must meet at a precise moment, the understanding no longer needs words, intuition and thought are enough to seize the opportunity to grasp the hand of God who works together with them to build a new heaven and a new earth.

A passionate booklet by Bell Hooks (pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins) entitled *Feminism Is for everybody*. The hypothesis that runs throughout the book is bold: feminism does not concern only a part of women (although it is widespread all over the world, from Russia, passing through India, Iran, the United States and reaching, say, up to a small town like Calitri in Irpinia), it is something more, its proposal is to change the way we look at human relationships.

Hooks reflects that feminism, from a marginal phenomenon, becomes central when it not only sets itself the goal of achieving equality between men and women but proposes a new reading of the contradictions that afflict our societies, combining sexist oppression with other forms of oppression such as racism and class division. And so it's a proposal for everyone.

In her books, she explores the interconnectedness (she calls it intersectionality) between forms of racial and gender oppression and capitalism in their ability to produce and perpetuate a system of oppression of the ruling class and that they interfere with the ability to communicate with each other.

In conclusion, the enemy of feminism is patriarchy, violence, racism, not men, indeed there can be an alliance between men and women for a non-classist, non-racist and non-violent society. A new paradigm to reflect on: us too, women and men together.

Bell Hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2014.

QUESTION to discuss

Are you satisfied with the male - female relationships in your communities or workplaces?

PRAYER

*Our God who is father and mother
God of all ages and all peoples,
God of all times and beyond time.
Envelop us in your love as a mother
embraces a daughter
and a son.
Sing to us sweetly like a father
humming a lullaby.
You know the joys and
sorrows of our hearts,
Our efforts for change and our
resistance to it.
Help us to make your ways,
our ways,
Your peace, our peace.
Your righteousness, our
righteousness. Amen*

9-10

DECEMBER 2023

Employability of women victims of violence



Photo Stefania Prandi

Violence against women cannot be fought if the issue of female employment is not also addressed, if women are not made economically independent. Economic violence, understood as the control of resources, denial of access to and management of money or participation in the world of work, deprives women of any possibility of emancipation. In Italy, about 40% of women do not have their own bank account and we have one of the worst percentages of employed women in Europe. Often, when a woman finds the courage to speak out, all the material problems of how to literally survive begin.

Empowerment and self-esteem support paths, income support measures, access to services, job placement programs are fundamental, structural support is needed and, above all, adequate funding is needed.

The anti-violence centers are the leaders of the many concrete initiatives aimed at helping women either to recover a greater awareness of work experiences or to acquire new skills, projects often in synergy with the territory and companies ranging from the help desk to work, to training courses, to orientation internships, to workshops. It is also necessary for women to undertake these paths in the most serene way possible, feeling supported, valid aids in this sense are babysitting services when there are children and cultural mediators for women migrants.

Work makes women economically independent but above all it gives her back her dignity and her role in society.

BIBLE VERSE

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.(Ecclesiastes 3,12-13)

COMMENTARY

In the midst of the vanity of existence, Ecclesiastes finds a light of hope and joy in being able to enjoy the fruit of his labor. It is a gift from God that allows the person to live his present with serenity, dignity and freedom.

Work, however, is also a right of all citizens, as our Constitution reminds us in Article 4, a right that must be promoted by those who govern so that everyone can enjoy it.

Ecclesiastes trusts in God who calls those who believe to treat everyone with justice and respect, starting with the most fragile categories.

Even in today's society, the fragile categories are more or less the same as then, and women - especially those who are alone - risk seeing their rights trampled on or not recognized, first and foremost that of a dignified, safe and well-paid job.

Ecclesiastes always reminds us that "for everything there is its time..." and perhaps this is the time to engage with women who are victims of violence to rebuild their lives starting from work.

PRAYER

*Between the tears of an exploited and defeated life,
among the moans for the violent solitude into which
I had been thrown,
I saw the sweetness of your gaze,
I felt the warmth of your hands
that firmly helped me to rise
from the dust.*

*My God, were they yours or those of the sister I met on my way?
I do not know. All I know is that
I am a woman, standing,
firm on my legs and looking at
the horizon in you. Amen*

QUESTION to discuss

How can our churches support women with difficult backgrounds who are victims of violence and help them regain their independence?