

HUMANS ARE NOT FOR SALE: “LIFE WITH THE OTHER: MIGRATION, DISPLACEMENT AND GENDER JUSTICE”

REFLECTING REFORMATION

I want to begin with this thought of Cora Coralina, Brazilian poetess, “I am that woman who climbs the mountain of life, removing stones and planting flowers.” That is the spirit of the Protestant Reformation that calls us together to remember Lutheran theology and the reality which we live on a global level as we face the great 500 years celebration in 2017. This reflection arises out of my experience as a young migrant woman, feminist and ordained pastor serving in migrant communities where women, children and youth try to overcome their poverty and the lack of opportunities in a land that has received them, even in the midst of fears that rouse otherness, the different. In Central America, the region from which I come, this reality is very painful with experiences for which it is known as the North Triangle: El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala and the movement of persons, children and families, toward Mexico, where these slave-trade situations are lived out, even unto death.

A LOOK AT THE GLOBAL AND LOCAL REALITY

Slave-trade and trafficking of persons are not synonymous although they each perpetuate a crime, that of the trafficker and the slave-trader. The illegal trafficking of migrants can be associated with slave-trade. Traffickers and slave-traders form part of a network which makes money by facilitating the illegal entry of persons and then exploiting them sexually or in the labor market in the area of their destination. The slave-trade of persons, different from trafficking, does not require the crossing of an international border. The correct term for “human trafficking” in Spanish is “trata de personas,” which is the term that appears in the Palermo Protocol and in national legislations.

A diagnostic about human trafficking which the Office of Gender Justice of CLAI based on a sampling of 32 Latin American and Caribbean women from 20 countries in the year 2014 shows in broad outline that not much is known about this topic, that some Protestant churches are known to be working in the processes of accompanying persons who suffer human trafficking; in addition they indicate that they lack information, that there are fears, and that they do not know many theological arguments which might accompany their defense. Nonetheless, they pointed out various actions that could be taken by the churches in order to confront this reality. Various churches and ecumenical groups work with refugees and in the strengthening of human rights. The focus of this paper intends to come out of the support of Luther’s theology, beginning with the document “Human beings are not for sale,” and then on thoughts of other images of God. That is our task.

LUTHER’S THEOLOGY AS A CRITIQUE OF OTHER IMAGES OF GOD.

“Human beings are not for sale” is one of three sub-themes of the central theme of this celebration: “Liberated by the Grace of God.” This is a theme that interprets, like a photograph the reality which many regions of our world live, as in Latin America. We are talking about the high-risk conditions of migration for those who do it, of seeking refuge, human trafficking, gender violence, and the growth of organized crime which filters into all of these spheres. This is a reality that can be read theologically from the economy and from theology. From the point of view of the economy the idea of “winners” and “losers,” is lauded, of “victims and victimizers” in an economy that is not life-giving. Friederike Nussel writes in his article, “The Human Condition: a Lutheran Perspective.” “Reason resides in the same nature as sin which, along with

Augustine, he found in the perversion of the will in accordance with which, human beings center on themselves. Without faith in God, human beings constantly are looking for their own honor and advantage instead of those of God and their fellow humans.” From the point of view of theology, it points out personal and structural sin and the announcement of God’s grace which liberates. Here I cite Friederike Nussel: “Luther criticized the ecclesial practice of imagining God as a businessman who sells His Grace to those who prepare themselves through good works. According to the Bible, the Grace of God is not for sale. God’s justification is not obtained by means of works. What’s more, God guarantees justification only by faith to those who trust in the Grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.”

This image of God as a businessman which Luther criticizes in his context is still present today. It is an image that we could add to others which feminist theology showed us, God as man, judge, vengeful. That image of the businessman god contradicts the doctrine of justification, of the understanding of justice and the God’s salvation of humanity and creation.

FROM THE IMAGE OF BUSINESSMAN GOD TO THE GOD OF LOVE AND HUMAN DIGNITY

What is it that defines a human being? Definitely there can be many things, but emotions are fundamental. One of the strong images that impacts human beings of whatever latitude is love. What are the emotions that determine us as humans or not? According to Humberto Maturana, Chilean biologist and pedagogue, “Love is the emotion that constitutes the acciones of accepting the other as a legitimate other in our life together; for this reason, to love constitutes a space of recurring interactions with another in which his/her presence is legitimate without requirements.” Maturana sustains that love is a daily act, and in that way makes it possible for us to tie together this thought with this image of the God of emotions.

The truth is that there is no affection without another, the other to love. God has planted the seed of love, and without affection and tenderness we lose everyone. I heard speak of the revolution of affection and tenderness as the point of departure, as the lenses with which we look at the world and persons. From our human condition we can make of love a daily act where the life of the other might be also my prayer and my action of valuing God’s good creation and God’s providence.

Again Nussel: “It is the responsibility of human beings to work for the well-being of this world and to promote justice and peace. This is possible because human beings were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26 ff).

SALVATION, HUMAN BEINGS, AND CREATION: THE IMAGE OF GOD THE CAREGIVER

Munib A Younan in his article says, “Life with the other: migration, displacement and gender justice” from the same book before mentioned, and he cited the Apostle Paul: ‘For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of God’s Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!’ (Romans 5:10). As Paul assures us, this salvation is a gift. It is not for sale. The three themes of ‘Not for sale’—salvation, human beings, and creation—are all related among themselves.”

In our societies, care, affection, and tenderness are attributes automatically assigned to women. For that reason, the analysis of gender is absolutely essential in order to make visible the relationships of power that require the reinforcing of some roles over others, the vulnerability of women in forced displacements, wars, migration and refuge. We would say that gender justice is an action of this caring for human beings

and creation in the search for achieving changes for a true social justice. I agree with Younan when he questions, "How can we care in the best way for those who need our assistance?" It occurs to me that we could develop a code of conduct based on our different writings and traditions. Gutierrez took the idea very seriously and, as a result, we developed a document entitled, "To welcome the stranger: affirmations of leaders of communities based on faith."

Since the actions of gender justice begin from the image of God the Caregiver, I believe with Carol Gilligan the theory of the ethic of care, when she says, "In a democratic context, care is a human ethic. To give care is what human beings do; to care for oneself and for others is a natural human capacity. The difference was not in the care and justice among women and men, rather between the democracy and the patriarchy."

There remain many stones still to remove in order to plant flowers alongside the refugees, migrants, those who suffer human trafficking, and women and little girls; from the Lutheran tradition we remember that: "We are sent to diaconal service based on baptism and strengthened by means of the Eucharist."

Let's go!!!

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