

SOUTH EUROPEAN WOMEN FROM ESWTR MEETING IN ROME (8-9 February 2014)

Last February took place in Rome, at Albergho Paolo VI (a house from the Little Sisters of the Holy Family) a meeting of women from South European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece). The Italian group of ESWTR, to whom we are all very thankful, organized the meeting. Maaïke de Haardt also participated.

This meeting was meant to be an opportunity for the participants to know each other, to share information on the situation of feminist theology in south European countries and to propose a common strategy in the context of ESWTR and of its biannual conferences. This wish for cooperation and sharing of needs, projects and solidarity in order to spread what south European countries are doing in the field of feminist theology arose from informal discussions in Dresden, during last august conference.

During the first day of the meeting in Rome we have shared information on the situation of feminist theology in each of our countries. We presented the situation in faculties, or religious sciences institutes, as well as associations, groups, movements and publications on feminist theology.

Each country presented detailed information on numbers of teachers and stuffs in the field of feminist theology taught at the faculties and institutes; number and type of publications, activities of feminist theology associations or groups. These data will be available at ESWTR webpage.

The south European countries have much in common:

1. Academia:

- In Portugal, Spain and Italy (countries with a Catholic majority) Faculties of Theology or institutes of Religious Sciences are ecclesiastical. Theology is not taught at civil universities. In Greece the Faculty of Theology is public (since the Orthodox Church is recognized by the State) and there are other private faculties where theology is taught. Orthodox priests have their own university system for theological and pastoral education of clergy (separate from public and private university system).

- Vatican's policy in the last 15 years fostered the creation of Institutes of Religious Sciences separated from Faculties of Theology. This opened the access to bachelor studies to laywomen and laymen, but turned more difficult the access to higher grades studies and faculties.

- In general, there are fewer women than men teaching at the faculties and religious institutes. Most of women teaching theology don't manage to introduce feminist theology approaches in their syllabus (because of ecclesiastical control).

- There are few women with chairs in theology in ecclesiastical faculties (and even fewer teaching feminist theology). Most of them only have half-time contracts or are invited.
- On the other hand, there are many women with bachelor degrees in theology teaching religion in high schools.
- Some schools and studies of feminist theology are not officially recognized by the universities and by the state. Some of these schools and studies will not be able to survive (e.g. EFETA – Seville, Spain).
- Humanities and Philosophy are declining in Spanish and Portuguese universities. Some Religious Sciences Institutes are changing their organisation and theological orientation (for instance, Aveiro Institute, in Portugal, instead of keeping its link with Comillas University depends now from San Dámaso Institute).
- Some research centres have many students (men and women) interested in religious sciences studies, but there are no projects or thesis on feminist or gender studies in the field of theology (Spain, Portugal).
- From a sociological point of view, women in religious communities continue to be taught to be submissive, to work on a voluntary basis in social activities and in catechesis of children and youth. Sacraments and liturgy remain in men's hands (commented by Greek colleagues).

2. Nets, associations, movements of women and of feminist theology

- Some nets and associations existing in all of our south European countries made a strategic option to turn work and thinking of female theologians visible. There are women in these associations with bachelor degrees, first grade, master and doctor titles in theology; and there are other associations and lay movements where women engage in a practical vindication of their rights.
- Some of these groups organize meetings or sessions of theology and biblical studies to spread feminist theology and gender problematic. However, some of them are losing the vitality they had in the 80s and 90s.
- Some groups and nets have annual meetings gathering activists, women from basis communities and scholars (Spain and Portugal).
- In Greece, there are two types of women's groups: groups studying "classical theology" and groups having a socio-historical approach to women's issues.
- In Portugal, activities organized by women with a recognized authority and political influence gather different types of public (in the case of Manuela Silva), but the audience is not so interested when feminist discourses are more radical or oppose openly to ecclesiastic statements.

3. Publishing:

- Some theologians' associations or groups of theology and feminist studies have webpages and their own collections (Asociación de Teólogas españolas-ATE (España); Coordinamento di Teologhe italiane-CTI (Italia); Asociación Nacional Teológica Kairos (Grecia); Asociación portuguesa de Teólogas feministas (Portugal); Col·lectiu de Dones en l'Església (Catalunya); Mujeres y teología (España); EFETA (Andalucía-España).

- In spite of the existence of many members of ESWTR coming from South-European countries there are not many publications in English from these members through the mechanisms offered by ESWTR. Reasons for this seem to be lack of time and poor human and economic resources.

PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE – COOPERATION BETWEEN SOUTH-EUROPEAN SECTION AND ESWTR:

Women gathered in Rome cherished the possibility of sharing experiences, visions, needs and challenges existing in each of the south-European countries. There are specific idiosyncrasies and differences between the various Christian traditions in this geographic area, but there are also common problems and difficulties calling for cooperation and mutual solidarity. The group is showed interest in promoting an open and creative exchange that will foster feminist theology, postcolonial theology and theological gender studies in Portugal, Greece, Italy and Spain.

In order to achieve this objective we will:

- **Foster the exchange** between South-European women during ESWTR conferences as well as in biannual meetings of our own.

- **Search for financial support** for a sociological research on the state of the art of feminist theology studies and teaching in South Europe or search for support on ways to publicise south European feminist theologies; or a research focused on the situation of migrant women in south European countries. Since we are aware of the difficulty to reach support from European institutions we will search for support from religious institutions (such as the Jesuits, through Porticus, or the Dominicans).

- **Ask ESWTR board for the possibility of having a place in its webpage** where south-European countries' women could share documents, articles, bibliography, opinion articles and data. These documents could be in Portuguese, Spanish and Italian, but it would be necessary to make an effort to translate the texts into English, so that the other ESWTR's member can understand them.

Contact-women from each countries will have the task to collect texts and send them to the woman responsible for ESWTR's webpage.

- **Focusing in two themes for the period of 2014/2015** (in connection with the theme of Rome's meeting and of next ESWTR conference in Thessaloniki):

a) women and theology;

b) impacts of crisis, poverty and migration in women's lives from a theological point of view.

- Ask for support for translation of 4 to 6 articles of south-European countries (from ESWTR or other sources) linked with the mentioned topics or with the theme of biannual conferences. This would allow sharing south-European women thinking with members from other sections.