



# Federazione donne evangeliche in Italia (fdei)

Fascicolo interno a RIFORMA n. 44 del 18 novembre 2022 Reg. Trib. Pinerolo n. 176/1951. Resp. ai sensi di legge: Alberto Corsani Edizioni Protestanti srl, via San Pio V n. 15, 10125 Torino Stampa: Alma Tipografica srl - Villanova Mondovì (CN)

## WOMEN UNDER ATTACK BRAVE AND REBEL

### 16 days to overcome violence

25 NOVEMBER – 10 DECEMBER 2022

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#### Introduction

While we were planning this notebook, arrived the news of the grim killing of the twenty-two-year-old girl Mahsa Amini in Iran due to a lock of hair sticking out of her veil hiab. The outrage that this crime and the subsequent bloody repressions that still continue as we write (31/10) prompted us to dedicate this issue to Iranian and Afghan women and their courageous rebellion against regimes inspired by religious fanaticism.

One of our ways of standing by their side is the graphic choice of reproducing on the various pages Shamsia Hassani's drawings, which give visibility to their aspiration for freedom in a very valuable artistic form.

At the same time we realized that women and their rights are everywhere under attack by those who want to continue to manage the world with that patriarchal power, which unfortunately has not diminished the virulence of its contagious in the minds of men (and also some women) because some fundamental rights (voluntary interruption of pregnancy, wage equality, access to contraception etc.) were conquered a few decades ago; not even in the most advanced western societies, one can safely assume that the laws in force are applied or are not subjected to attempts at revision or modification, especially in those countries where illiberal right-wing governments (such as Italy) come forward.

In sentimental relationships between women

and men, then, the more women claim autonomous spaces and times, the more they attack, sometimes in a brutal and heinous way, the so-called life-partners, who feel deprived of control over what they consider their own "property", the woman's body, and often, too often, decide to eliminate it. Feminicides are not stopped, also due to an underestimation by the police, sometimes, of the danger announced by the denunciations and despite the commitment of the anti-violence centres. Not even the exploitation of prostituted women shows signs of decreasing appreciably, indeed with the war that broke out in Europe new possibilities for organizing trafficking have opened up, in the chaos. We have not included a page on this issue, so we refer you to the 16 days 2021, where it was extensively illustrated.

In this gloomy global picture, what comforts us is the light that shines from the courageous rebellion of younger girls, many women and even some men of good will, who even risk their own lives in an attempt to change their destiny. To all the movements that, from South America to India, are acting in this direction, we want to express our deepest solidarity, in words and actions, according to our material and spiritual possibilities. We want to hope that even our small prayers of each of the 16 days can set in motion the subversive energies of the unjust world order in which women are still the last, according to Jesus's promise "the last ones will be first ones".

*Claudia Angeletti*

25 NOVEMBER 2022

# Iran: the revolution is female



## WOMEN WITHOUT MEN

directed by **Shirin Neshat**,  
France, Iran, Germany, 2009', 95'

During the coup to restore the Shah (1953), four women bravely face each their own specific path to freedom, trying to break the circle of overwhelming power of men

In 2007 I had the privilege of attending a meeting in Iran organized by the World Council of Churches and the Center for Interreligious Dialogue in Tehran. A strong experience that preceded by 2 years the first major mass protest in Iran. About twenty women of different professions, Iranian and various European, African and North American countries discussed the issues of faith, the role of women in society and culture. A meeting of curious and prudent women, made up of many questions, answers and silences. Sometimes silence, respect and the desire to be able to build a true dialogue were more important. But the trip to Iran was not only this: before and after I toured the country a bit with a young Iranian woman who had been studying in Italy for years. With her I met “carbonare” women who collected signatures for women’s rights.

*For years, Iran has been plagued by mass protests, always harshly repressed by the moral police of the Iranian regime.*

*This time the protest – which quickly spread to more than 80 cities – was triggered by the killing of Mahsa Amini, a Kurd, because she wore the veil inappropriately. The strong repression did not stop the protests: symbolically expressed by the cutting of hair in the square.*

*These protests are just the tip of an iceberg that has deep roots. The veil is only a sign of oppression, of an authoritarian relationship between power and civil society made up of women and men. Perhaps even this protest will end leaving a long trail of dead, wounded and imprisoned. But those who fight for change will protest again, and they will need*

*our solidarity. Let’s all cut a tuft of hair to say that under the veil there is a brain that thinks and asks for freedom.*

## BIBLE VERSE

*“I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.” (1 Timothy 2,9-12)*

## COMMENT

*Yes, it is not a text taken from a book of moral defenders in Iran, but some verses of the New Testament, the First Letter to Timothy. How can we read them today? Do they concern us too? Feminist theologians in their work of rereading the Bible have focused on grasping the plot of a message of liberation for whoever in the Gospel, but also in the Old Testament. And there is this message! Stories of women who were preachers, deacons, active in the first Christian communities. Then, however, a patriarchal attitude emerged that wanted women in silence.*

*Christianity, too, in its long history, has carried out acts of repression against women, but women have rebelled, proposing new relationships between men and women, denouncing behaviors that are the fruit of a human culture and not of the Lord’s will. And so it is right to rebel and change.*

## PRAYER

*Lord, please give us the strength to stand by our Muslim sisters in Iran and in all countries where the arrogance (and fears) of men oppress, imprison and kill them. May our gestures and their hopes for liberation be sustained by your will. Turn your gaze to them, protect them, help them and change the stone hearts and blind eyes of those men. Amen.*

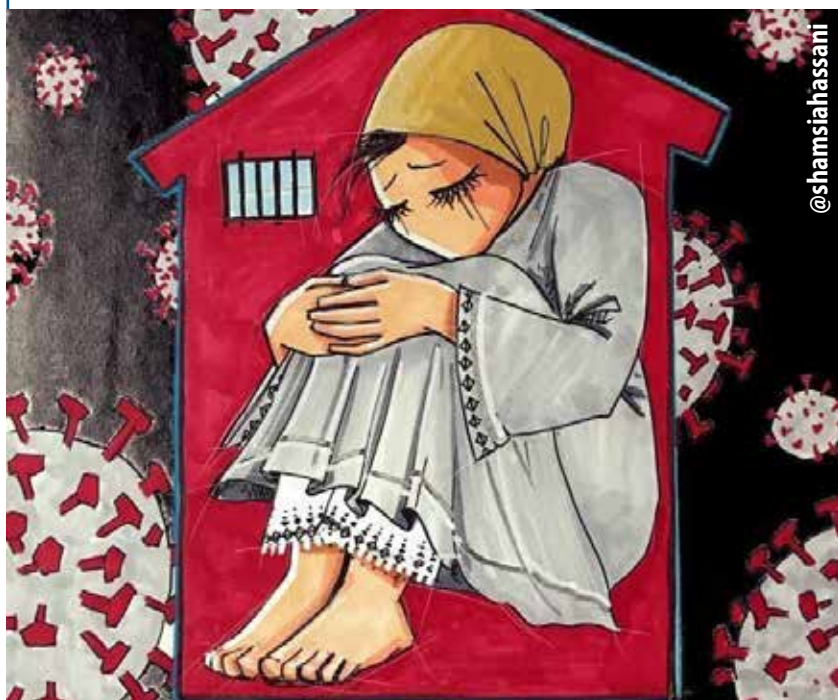
## QUESTION to discuss

How long can women’s need for freedom be suppressed?



26 NOVEMBER 2022

# Prevention is better than cure



**A**rticle 32 of the Constitution enshrines the right to psychophysical health, but today this right is strongly hampered by the lack of an efficient social policy and a culture of prevention, and by the inequalities aggravated by the Covid 19 pandemic. In particular, women, who have also played an important role as protagonists in the social context precisely because of their ability to accept the needs of others, how can they fully exercise their right to psychophysical integrity? The first weapon that women have is prevention: from early childhood to old age, it is necessary to guarantee correct and constant information that makes women fully aware of the opportunity to improve their health and therefore their lives. In childhood and adolescence, the foundations of one's health are laid with correct lifestyles, with learning to know one's body, with protecting oneself from sexually transmitted infections (and here we must unfortunately record the shortcomings of institutions in promoting education to health, sexuality and affectivity in schools). Adulthood should see a correct knowledge of health issues not only for oneself but also for the family in order to reach a serene, active old age, limiting as much as possible all those factors that make this phase of life often sad, in solitude and with precarious health, also for the imbalances of wage between the two sexes which then turn into lower retirement benefits.

## QUESTION to discuss

Prevention costs less or more than cure?

## BIBLE VERSE

*In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. (Acts 9:36-41)*

## COMMENT

Throughout history, women have suffered discrimination and abuse, and even today the situation in many countries is very serious and calls loudly for women and men to take responsibility for this unacceptable condition. Even where women's emancipation is a reality, however, there are more or less subtle forms of discrimination, for example when health care is not guaranteed in its various aspects: the Gospel always invites us in the first place to unmask such situations and to intervene. Tabitha's return to life places before our gaze the care of God who embraces this woman, described as full of talent and value, in full continuity with the action of Jesus of Nazareth. Today Churches are called to bring special attention to the world whenever being a woman becomes synonymous with discrimination or more or less strong forms of violence.

## PRAYER

*Our Lord, we ask for the ability and strength to work tirelessly so that every situation in which a woman is "mortified" may be healed by Your life-giving grace that makes our hands capable of action, our hearts capable of courageous struggle, our minds attentive to the needs of those oppressed by injustice and violence. Amen*

27

NOVEMBER 2022

# Contraception - still a taboo?



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**T**he Italian girls of the 70's approached their first sexual experiences with a certain fear, if not a real terror of getting pregnant outside of marriage: the family, except in rare cases, had not provided information on ways to prevent a pregnancy that would mess up their lives and the social stigma on single mothers was very strong. Also for this reason collective feminist and self-awareness groups spread and served to inform and train a generation of conscious women. Also for this reason feminist collectives and self-awareness groups spread and served to inform and train a generation of conscious women. We were fortunate enough to read and study seminal books such as "Our Bodies, Ourselves" of the Boston Women's Health Collective, which led us into the world of contraception. Our battle for the approval of a law for the voluntary interruption of pregnancy went hand in hand with that for education in contraception and recourse to counseling. On the other hand, today's girls do not seem to know where to inquire to understand how to manage their body and defend its control also because they

often consider recourse to counseling as improper. A further problem is the cost of contraceptives: only 3 regions, Puglia, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, have activated free distribution through clinics, despite the law 405/1975 provides for it throughout the national territory. Unfortunately, the consequence is that a considerable number of abortions occur among the very young, even minors.

## BIBLE VERSE

*"While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't despair, for you have another son." As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath."* (Genesis 35,16-19)

## COMMENT

Especially in the first books of the Bible, the obligatory task of the woman was to have many children, even at the cost of her own life. The law of the clan was higher than the expectations of the individual person. It almost hurts to read the two judgments expressed in this little story: there is the midwife who says "do not be afraid, you are a perfect mother because you are giving birth to another male, it does not matter if you die in childbirth" and then her husband Jacob who remains very happy with this newborn, calling him "son of happiness", without any sorrow for the loss of his wife. The name that Rachel had given to the newborn, "son of my misfortune", has no value and no longer interests anyone. Thank goodness that over the centuries the female gender has gained the awareness of its rights and the self-esteem of not being less loved by God than males. And not like a simple reproductive machine. We must no longer sacrifice ourselves in the name of a patriarchal idea, tradition or culture. The encounter with Jesus transformed our lives forever.

## PRAYER

*God, source of inexhaustible love for all your creatures, give young couples serenity in planning their life together, do not leave mothers alone at the hour of childbirth and accompany spouses in their decision of how many children to have. Amen*

## QUESTION to discuss

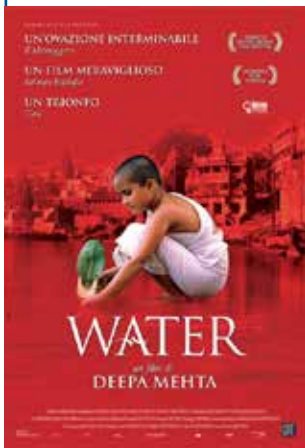
Why the contraception still meet many obstacles?



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NOVEMBER 2022

# Voluntary interruption of pregnancy my body is me



## WATER

Directed by **Deepa Mehta**, Canada, India, 2005, 114'

Story of a child widow-wife, locked up with other women, according to the Hindu tradition, in an ashram/monastery. Some of them rebel inspired by the message of freedom of Gandhi

**A**bstortion is now a political problem: the wind of the conservative right is blowing down on women, regressing the freedom of choice over their bodies attained in the 70s.

In the US, the Supreme Court, ruling that abortion is not a constitutional right, has mandated individual states to legislate on the matter, so that more than 30 million women in 16 states do not have access to abortion.

In Hungary there is a law on the “fetal heartbeat”, which obliges doctors to provide women with “clear indications of the vital signs of the fetus” to dissuade them from surgery: it is not a real “heartbeat”, but a sound of the ultrasound monitor that represents the electrical impulses emitted by the first cells.

In Italy, Law 194 on the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (despite having reduced the use of abortion by 40% in its 42 years of application) is still strongly hampered by the very high number of objectors, gynecologists and anesthesiologists (on average 70%, but in Molise 95%, and in many regions 90%), as well as by the absence of clear information, including pharmacological IVG's.

“Bans and other restrictions on abortion disproportionately affect poor women, those who face racial discrimination, as well as rural women, LGBTIQ people, women with disabilities, adolescent girls, migrant women, and single-parent families with a female breadwinner”. The European Parliament noted that on 7 July 2022 it proposed to include “the right to safe and legal abortion” in the *Bill of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*.

## BIBEL VERSE

*“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?...”* (1 Corinthians 6: 19)

## COMMENT

Body as temple of the Spirit, imperative to purity. The temple cannot be “dirty”, impure, it must be immaculate, a place that houses the unreachable. To women and men, these words have been imposed to justify an immaculate life, perfect outer packaging to show to the world. And yet, is it not precisely the Spirit of God who liberates, opening to hope? How can the house of God be interpreted as a space of constraint, fear, violent order? Should we not reread these words, accepting the liberation and self-determination that God offers in Christ to all his creatures? That decision-making and existential that breaks the cages of patriarchy which say that we do not decide for our bodies. Body as a temple of the Spirit, home that hosts the unexpected, that of the Word that frees you, that tells you not to respond to the norms and to the image decided by others. You are a unique creature, free, loved in the eyes of God who does not dwell in temples of stones, but lives in healthy and true relationships that we know how to build.

## PRAYER

*Lord who took shape, walked, touched, embraced, healed; Spirit who dances and who dwells; God of liberation touched by hand and lived in the body; teach us to listen to alterity starting from us: bodies, lives, gazes, hugs, smiles and tears, different tangles, bound by You, to each other*

## QUESTION to discuss

How to accompany a woman in her decision to abort?

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NOVEMBER 2022

# Afghanistan: women under the heel of the taliban



## THE GREEN BICYCLE

directed by **Haifaa Al-Mansur**, Saudi Arabia, 2012, 92'

In a country like Saudi Arabia where women cannot ride bicycles or use bright colors, a rebellious girl gets the money to buy one with a Koran recitation competition...

**T**he situation of Islamic women in Islamic nations is deteriorating day by day. Especially in Afghanistan, where after 20 years of preparing a space for women in the country and to change the patriarchal aspect of the nation, all the activities of women and men in that country have collapsed with the return of the Taliban, one of the most extremist religious groups. In the early days of their rule, the Taliban issued more than 40 orders for women. Their first rights as human beings have been abolished: they no longer have the right to study or work, they must be accompanied by a man when they want to go out on the street, but if it is a younger boy, they can be stoned to death. Many girls are forced to marry without being asked for their opinion. Unfortunately, the world is silent in the face of this cruelty, which destroys the human being and the human spirit. The level of depression and violence among boys and girls has increased and there is no clear future for them. Those who could have fled the country and those who remained are looking for a way to escape. Despite all these difficulties, Afghan women bravely went out on the streets with clenched fists and loud voices, protesting against this government of ignorance. Although they have been whipped, tortured and thrown into prison, they do not turn back and remain in the streets to demand justice and equality.

## BIBLE VERSE

Then *drew near* the daughters of Zelophead the son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, from the clans

of Manasseh the son of Joseph. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. (Numbers 27,1) And the Lord said to Moses, "They are right". (Numbers 27, 6-7)

## COMMENT

The **coming forward** of the daughters is a constant challenge that women face with courage to affirm their dignity and rights. In this case against the "sacred" norms that discriminated against them, thus demonstrating that tradition is not written in stone, that it is possible to take necessary actions to disturb the status quo and erase centuries of prejudices and traditions that discriminate against them. And this is what God does, siding against the law that silences the rights and accentuates patriarchal submission. God agrees with the daughters of Zelophead. God said, "**They are right.**"

## PRAYER

*God, you who yearn for law to flow like water and justice like a torrent, inspire us to defend and show solidarity with the women in the world who seek to change their history. Let the courage of solidarity flow through us. Make us consciously able to leave the places that make us feel comfortable to move forward in a peaceful, but at the same time strongly prophetic rebellion.*

*So that the Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah of our times, who do not give up and are not afraid of silence, face every issue with courage, in a society where certain questions cannot yet be asked. Amen*

## QUESTION to discuss

Which concrete action can we do for women who, in the world, are subjected to violence and segregation?

30

NOVEMBER 2022

# Women's job: few and fragile, especially for mothers



## SPERIAMO CHE SIA FEMMINA

directed by **Mario Monicelli**, Italia/  
Francia, 1986

Ironic portrait, sometimes dramatic of a family in which are compared the fragility of males and the firmness of a female universe, represented by unforgettable characters for their sympathy

**T**hat Italy is the Cinderella in Europe for female employment rates is widely known. Only 53 out of 100 women belonging to the “working age” population between 20 and 64 have a job in 2021, compared to 72 men out of 100. In Europe, only Greece has worse values than ours. At the same time, unemployment is higher among women, and above all inactivity, that is, the condition of those who also give up looking for work, because they consider themselves deprived of any possibility of finding, or because the other job, that of care, also prevents them from looking for it.

Irregular job, temporary job, part-time job, especially involuntary work, not chosen by women but subjected to, are higher among women, because full-time job is not available.

But it is worth understanding for which women the situation is worse. Not for women with a high degree (and there are many, because women make up the majority of graduates, even if they are still too few in scientific disciplines), not for women without children, but for those who have children, especially small ones. The employment rate of women aged 25-49 with children under the age of 6 is 54% while that of women of the same age without children is 74%. 20 points of difference, in which the main reason why we have so few children in Italy should be sought.

## BIBLE VERSE

*“And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters.”* (Ruth 2: 2-3)

## COMMENT

At first glance, the Bible appears to be dominated by the patriarchal stereotype that wants the woman in the house, excluded from the public space. But a close reading shows how this situation is the result of that desire for domination that immediately poisons the relationship between men and women. In the Garden of Eden we hear only the voice of Adam, who specifies Eve, to whom he discharges the responsibility for transgression. In the scene that denounces guilt, patriarchy is described: the male in a dominant position, who works the land; the dominated woman, who gives birth in pain. But the Bible also sets up the scene of the ransom: another garden, that of the Song of Songs, in which it is the woman who takes the floor and the initiative. And then Ruth, another Sulamita, who is not afraid to leave home to earn bread and reopen history to messianic hope.

## PRAYER

*Give us the wisdom of Naomi, who does not confine but invites you to go. Give us the courage of Ruth, the foreigner who is not afraid to expose her difference Grant us, Lord, to dare to dream big, together with the cunning of small gestures possible. And let that while we glean in other people's fields we rediscover meaning and dignity of our lives, beyond famine and paralysis, to generate a future.*

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**Also this year the 16 Days will be translated** not only in English (Annie Marcelo), but also in German (Rete delle donne luterane) and Spanish (Claudia Florentin). We thank all the volunteer translators for their difficult work.

## QUESTION to discuss

Which experiences of exclusion or underestimation have we lived during our working time?



1 DECEMBER 2022

# Did the glass roof of politics in Italy break?



**I**n Italy we have the first woman Prime Minister. A little more than 76 years have passed since women were able to express themselves with the vote: it was the referendum on the monarchy and there were those who feared the emotionality of the women's vote. That was not the case. We have had many women who are valid as "constituent mothers" and many articles of our Constitution that enshrine women's rights are written thanks to them. So then for several years women in parliament worked to have laws in favor of women, mothers and workers. Until the great season of reforms of the 70s (equal pay, family rights, 194, the abolition of the honor crime, law

on sexual violence etc.).

And then? Women have appeared in the various professions, in addition to those traditionally assigned to them (teachers, professors, nurses), up to the recent first woman, Samantha Cristoforetti, to direct an international space station. Yet for years the glass roof over women's heads seem to have thickened in a stop-and-go pattern. First woman President of the Government and only 6 women appointed out of 24 ministers and none in key roles. For the first time in 20 years, less than 31% of women are elected to parliament. In these ugly elections, males have closed ranks and women have been marginalized. Why? Why do the tough start playing when the game gets tough? What if other values such as concreteness, dialogue, listening could be affirmed?

Here we have to start again, rejecting visions, roles and methods that are still all masculine.

## BIBLE VERSE

"Jesus was at Bethany, a guest of Simon the

*Leper. While he was eating dinner, a woman came up carrying a bottle of very expensive perfume. Opening the bottle, she poured it on his head. Some of the guests became furious among themselves. "That's criminal! A sheer waste! This perfume could have been sold for well over a year's wages and handed out to the poor." They swelled up in anger, nearly bursting with indignation over her"* (Mark 14,3-5)

## COMMENT

A woman breaks into a room of only men and makes a sudden, improper gesture that irritates them: she wastes precious oil to anoint Jesus' head. Many other things could have been done with the money that this oil was worth. Two logics: on one hand a free gesture, full of faith and foresight, on the other the annoyance for waste, unable to grasp the value of that gesture. In this situation, Jesus surprisingly intervenes and agrees with this woman: "*Let her alone. Why are you giving her a hard time? She has just done something wonderfully significant for me. You will have the poor with you every day for the rest of your lives. Whenever you feel like it, you can do something for them. Not so with me.*" Two logics, one a mute declaration of faith and the other unable to grasp it, which sees only the useful and stops there. How much did contempt for this woman weigh on this attitude? And if he had been a man, would it have been the same? We don't know. We only know that Jesus says: "*And you can be sure that wherever in the whole world the Message is preached, what she just did is going to be talked about admiringly.*"

## PRAYER

*Lord, how many gestures of women in history have been condemned or ignored just because they are women? It is you, with your Son Jesus, who give us the courage to make many gestures even against the approval of men, for a different future of men and women. Amen.*

## QUESTION to discuss

And is there a glass roof in our churches?



2 DECEMBER 2022

# Young women between desires and disillusion



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In 2022 in Italy the problem is not just being a woman, it is being a young woman. For heaven's sake, surely we are in a privileged situation since we are in the North of the World and in Europe and being a white and skilled woman is an added advantage. But being a young woman means that in addition to the difficulties given by our gender, there are also the registry ones, so the job interviews we find ourselves sustaining are for precarious and underpaid jobs, and in addition, we are asked if we want to become mothers or if we already are. Nothing surprising about this situation since the minimum wage in Italy

is utopia and paternity leave is only ten days, it has been law since 2012 and stopped being "experimental" only last year. Right now the problem is not simply the wage gap between men and women - that we remember, it does exist!-, but to be able to obtain a contract that provides for remuneration corresponding to the workload in which sickness and holidays are provided. Also because without all this, how do you go to live alone and support yourself? All the young women I know often put together two or more jobs to make ends meet and even those few who have managed to get the long-awaited permanent term still do not earn enough to live alone. Given the capitalist society in which we live, women's freedom passes through economic independence, and fighting for a fair and equitable labor market would also help young men, which do no harm.

## BIBLE VERSE

*"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages,"* (Jeremiah 22,13)

## COMMENT

The prophet Jeremiah announces that whoever knows God knows justice and lives by putting it into practice. So he accuses vehemently who has no respect for the work of his neighbor, who does not work according to justice. Faced with the situation in which women are too often forced to do more jobs to make ends meet, without contracts that protect sickness and motherhood, denouncing injustice and invoking God's justice may seem pusillanimous, a way of whining one's discontent. And yet, without crying over each other, we can be sure that God is on the side of those who behave according to righteousness, of those who claim their dignity.

## PRAYER

*Our God,  
Give us the opportunity to live according to your righteousness, Inspire you by it we can resist and fight in the face of every abuse, any annulment of rights that protect the work of all. You have given us in Jesus Christ the subversion of every established order, You have placed us as witnesses of your Son's resurrection even before your disciples, Give us more wisdom and tenacity to confront every injustice, every humiliation and every devaluation of one's work. May the price of the work of so many women be not frustration, resentment, fatigue and affliction; But may it be a source of pride, joy and personal satisfaction. Amen.*

## QUESTION to discuss

How can we defend equal dignity in work between young women and men?

3 DECEMBER 2022

# Right to happiness for all



**T**here are women, and women: those who arrive first, the last and the endless crowd of those who are in the middle, without names. The firsts are always too few (discouraging statistics on the number of managers, politicians, scientists), but they get visibility and complacency. It is of little interest to know how much of themselves they have left behind to arrive, how much incompleteness they keep inside. The lasts can be ignored, mocked, but also mourned, helped, erected as a symbol of the wickedness of the West, when it comes to migrants, women, always victims of another world even when they are victims of men of this world of ours because it is difficult to admit that the violent is among us. The middle women, the penultimate, work to support themselves, often forced to part-time for family needs, fired more easily than men, paid less. Because of the difficulties they encounter, they renounce desires, projects, personal aspirations. The method of Equal Opportunities has not had satisfactory results, affecting only the top of the social pyramid, in a historical period in which the social elevator is blocked.

In this panorama which woman is, I do not say happier which is a big word, but

more comfortable in her mind and body as a woman, with freedom to be there? It should be universally clear that taking away aspirations, dreams, ideas, projects, transforming life into an obstacle course, where if you fall you hardly get up, is violence.

Is it too much to hope for a time of new sorority between the first, who have more power to act, the last and the penultimate, knowing that none is devoid of power and freedom?

## BIBLE VERSE

*“.....All the widow stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” (Acts 9: 39-40)*

## COMMENT

Great must have been the happiness of the widows in embracing their favourite alive again. Tabitha was not a rebel, but was a brave woman. In fact, she had embraced Christianity at a time of persecution. And she had done it as consistently as possible, so much so that she was called a “disciple”, the first and only woman to receive this title in the New Testament. Tabitha was a busy woman who took care of the last and most fragile of the time: the widows. She had established strong bonds of sisterhood with them. She made garments and clothes for them. They were tailor-made clothes, because she considered widows as people, not as an indistinct category. Then Tabitha got ill and died. Peter was called to intervene and when he arrived the women were there. The roles had been reversed. It was no longer Tabitha who came to the aid of the widows, it was them who showed Peter the tangible goodness of the disciple, asking him for the impossible. In following Jesus, differences are annulled, relationships are tightened, the new sorority transcends the times and becomes real and possible. And in this scenario, Tabitha comes back to life.

## PRAYER

*Lord, help us to be your disciples, never indifferent to violence, always ready to act for good.*

## QUESTION to discuss

What does the right to happiness mean in our lives?



4 DECEMBER 2022

# The indomitable mothers (and grandmothers) at Plaza De Mayo



## 3 POSTERS IN EBBING MISSOURI

directed by **Martin McDonagh**, USA/UK, 2017, 115'

The pain of the loss of a daughter, (of a son) is not surmountable: the tenacity of the request for justice by the mother-courage of this film is a condemnation without appeal for the violent of all latitudes

It has been 45 years since the Armed Forces seized power in Argentina in a coup d'état on March 24, 1976, but the courageous struggle of women who suffered the loss of daughters, sons, husbands, family members opposed to the regime is not over. It is estimated that no less than 30,000 people have been arrested, illegally detained, tortured, killed and disappeared: *desaparecidos*, disappeared into thin air, in reality many thrown from planes in the Rio de la Plata.

Since then, every Thursday their mothers gather in the Plaza de Mayo in the center of Buenos Aires with a white handkerchief knotted on their heads, (originally the canvas diaper used for newborns), walking around the pyramid that is in the center, with protest signs and photographs: at the beginning they demanded the return of their missing children. Three of the founders of the Association were arrested and in turn disappeared. But to this day the others persist so that at least the secret history of the disappearance of their loved ones is recognized, reconstructed and made known, and the culprits are identified and punished.

Together with the *madres*, the *avuelas* (grandmothers) and the *familiares* try to find at least the grandchildren, born in prison by those pregnant who disappeared. Managed as "spoils of war", these children were either sold, or kept by the military as their own, or abandoned as children of NN and perhaps adopted later. The grandmothers wish to return to them the affection of their true family and the identity that has been violently denied them.

## BIBLE VERSE

*"Early the next morning took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob."* (Genesis 21: 14-16)

## COMMENT

We are faced with a foreigner mother named Hagar who was sent away with her child from the house where she has always diligently played the role of servant, was at the bottom of despair upon reaching the desert. She lays the dying son's body under a shrub. The fate of the child seems sealed. The suffering of this woman is inexpressible. She goes a little farther so as not to see him die and emits a heart-breaking scream. It is the cry of those who do not accept to survive their child. It is the cry of those who understand that they have suffered an unjustified wrong from people, Abraham and Sarah, from whom it was legitimate to expect protection and not abandonment to certain death in the desert. It is the cry of all mothers in the world in front of a marked destiny of a son or daughter who, instead of being valued and well integrated into the democratic processes of a society, is deprived of life. And the mother is left with nothing but cry, protest, complain, request for justice, even after years, because that son or daughter is her own life.

## PRAYER

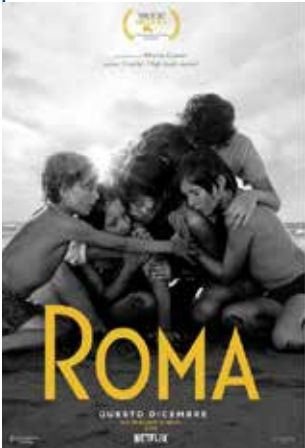
*O God, when life shows us its shadow face and when vampires with human faces violently deprive mothers of their dearest affections, may their cries, yesterday as today, not fall into the void of our indifference. May those cries reach us, as well as your ears. In you, wounded humanity finds the strength not to resign itself to the pain caused by the many tyrannies scattered throughout the world.*

## QUESTION to discuss

Sometimes memory fades: how can we keep it alive for a better future?

5 DECEMBER 2022

# Caregivers: semi-slaves or human beings?



## ROMA

directed by **Alfonso Cuarón**, Mexico, 2018, 135'

Story of an Indian maid of a wealthy family in Mexico City (Roma district) exploited and vilified, yet full of dignity, sweetness, ability to care.

## BIBLE VERSE

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."* (Ezekiel 36, 26-27)

## COMMENT

Ezekiel illustrates a transplant: a stiffened heart unable to guarantee life is removed and replaced with a soft and lively heart. Even the spirit requires maintenance: the human spirit is rebellious, elusive to God's action, but when we admit how much we need Him, God can "make sure" that we begin to walk according to His laws, putting His Spirit within us!

**W**e entrust them with our elderly and our homes, sometimes even our children, but we offer them ridiculous wages, unacceptable hours and, too often, without a regular contract. More than 60% of domestic workers are foreigners and among them, more than 80% are women. Many work illegally to ensure a slightly more substantial compensation while renouncing the right to health care, contributions and protections that would be entitled by right. No days off, no sick leave, no space for private life. And in some cases, behind the market of foreign caregivers, there are mechanisms equal to those of human trafficking: the recruiters contact you to offer the job, pay the trip to Italy, and then "place" you with a family, with endless shifts, depriving you of your passport, threatening to let you end on the sidewalk if you do not comply with the rules and even demanding bribes to be paid to the organization. Family members are less and less present with the elderly, increasingly demanding in carrying out household chores, humanity has lesser place in working relationships with these people. We see them less.

On the web there are ads such as "Caregiver Service 7 days a week ... from 720€". Yes, you read that right. This kind of injustice, made possible by the need of the victims and often silenced by the walls of the home and by the complicity between exploiters and "employers", demands justice, demands our attention.

## QUESTION to discuss

How to make caregivers' lives more dignified?

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, thank you for your presence in our lives. You free the prisoners, raise up those who have fallen, heal those who are wounded. Help us to tell the truth, give us courage to denounce injustices and collaborate in the liberation of those who are exploited. Make us attentive and sensitive. May you be blessed always. Amen*



6 DECEMBER 2022

# Being old (and lonely?)



## FRIED GREEN TOMATOES AT THE WHISTLE STOP CAFE

directed by **Jon Avnet**, USA, 1991, 125'

From the narration of a sprightly old woman in a nursing home, a frustrated woman learns an engaging story of love, friendship, rebellion against racism, which becomes the inspiration for her radical life change.

### Antonia, 86 years old

**I** got married for a second time with a man eager for affection, companionship and support like me. It was nice, as long as I could be the strong element of the couple. When I had a stroke, and consequently he had to assist me, I was "convinced" to leave our home and relegated to an RSA. I felt like I'm in a prison, golden sure, but it's not my home.

Let's start with words. I say "old", not aged, senior, and so on. I want to challenge all the unpleasant that hides this term.

Being an old lady is not like being an old man: women's old age is a little different, and it is often a little worse than the male one. First of all, more often it means being alone: among people in their eighties, only 40% of women are still married, while 80% of men still are. Men live four to five years less than women (on average) but more rarely are alone in the final period of their lives. Us women live longer, but in return we live alone. Today there are 8 million so-called single-person households, and account for a third of all households. Half of these 8 million are people over 65. Being an elderly means being a caregiver of the husband, or partner, after having been the caregiver of the parents and perhaps of the husband's parents. But later, when personal assistance, affection and company is needed, there is no one to count on.

The reform about care for dependent elderly people has just been approved, but it requires certain implementation times and adequate funding. Today, two-thirds of RSA guests are women. And alternatives to RSA, or the humanization of RSA, are large parts to be built.

## BIBLE VERSE

*"Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come."* (Psalm 71, 18)

## COMMENT

The old one praying of Israel experienced the presence and help of God's power in all the persecutions he suffered. Now he finds himself in greater difficulty because of his advanced age: his strength declines and opponents may think that God has abandoned him. His request for help, however, does not have a disconsolate and weak tone, as we might expect in a person aggravated by the weight of age. Quite the opposite: he asks for new energies in order to be able to effectively transmit his own witness to the new generations! Aware of being inserted into the great history of salvation, he claims the relevance of his own human and spiritual experience and a still active role in society: he does not ask for himself, selfishly, but for the sake of the future generation and for the greater glory of God.

## PRAYER

*O Lord of our day, we do not ask you to prolong our lives indefinitely and under any conditions. More than the number of years, please give us the ability to live them in the light of your grace, in solidarity with our neighbor, in the dignity of your daughters, your beloved and loved sons. Grant us to be able to express in word and deed our gratitude for what you have done in us, for Christ our Lord. Amen*

## QUESTION to discuss

What solutions for an old age woman? Let's think about it!

7 DECEMBER 2022

# Women behind bars: is this life?



## Elena, 39 years old

**T**he first thing they do here is deprive you of your affections. I cannot receive phone calls or have interviews. But I rediscovered the letters. People outside only look at the crimes, they don't know why we did them, they don't know our history behind it, they don't know that we are human beings.

To end up behind bars in Italy are few women (4.5%), mostly foreigners and coming from the margins of society. Their cells are small and overcrowded, the bathrooms rarely have a bidet, essential for intimate hygiene, or provide adequate spaces for children. The control of the guards often leads to sexual harassment, rape or even gratuitous brutality (two striking cases: a detainee made to give birth in handcuffs, another dragged naked to the ground on cold water by male agents). Numerous suicides.

Last March a letter was composed by 31 inmates of the "Le Vallette" prison in Turin: they boldly asked the institutions to take into account the worsening of their prison conditions as a result of the pandemic and to increase early release from 45 to 75 days. This measure, used from 2010 to 2015 for overcrowding (endemic problem) that can be granted for good behavior.

"Our confinement from covid has been made very heavy from the psychological and affective point of view: we have been even more isolated" reads a passage of the text "we ask you to acknowledge us all the dignity of

being citizens and not just numbers".

## BIBLE VERSE

*"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."* (Luke 12, 6-7)

## COMMENT

The New Testament contains many examples and parables to indicate the love of GOD. For all of us, in the most difficult and sad moments of our lives, because of loneliness, fear, illness, isolation, despair and discouragement, this verse of Luke can represent a certainty and a promise: *You are worthy, you are worth a lot. I know the situation you are in and I guarantee you that I will not abandon you. Do not be afraid, I know you to the end, with your thoughts, your problems, your shortcomings and your gifts. I will be close to you, do not fear men, but fear (seek) me.*

As a child I worried the fact that God knows us so deeply, until I understood that this word is not an expression to warn, but to manifest the immense and unconditional love that He reserves for us. I do not have to worry about my mistakes and my limitations but seek the good and live it and HIS support will not fail.

## PRAYER

*God the Father and Mother,  
Women prisoners are loved  
by you as your daughters,  
You love and esteem them  
like each of us. We know that  
they are facing a very difficult  
life. Give us the right understanding  
and sensitivity to be concretely close to them.  
We beg you, deliver us from  
evil and heal their and our  
wounds. Help us not to lose  
the courage and tenacity to  
build a better future. Amen*

## QUESTION to discuss

How can we make visible not only the conditions of women in prison, but also their lives?



8 DECEMBER 2022

# Exploited in the name of jesus christ



## MAGDALENE

directed by **Peter Mullan**, UK, 2002, 114'

A lucid bill of indictment against those who, in the name of religion, caused humiliation and suffering to thousands of girls in Ireland in the 60s.

### Gabriela, 65 years old, Bolivia

**W**hen I was 12 years old, some priests from Buenos Aires arrived in the church of my village in Bolivia; Together with our parish priest they convinced my mother to let me leave with them for that distant city. They said I had a “vocation to holiness, to serve God”, they would make me study and develop my gifts. I never studied, I had to work for 50 years as a servant in the residences of the members of Opus Dei, without any compensation, up to 15 hours a day; I never took a hot shower and every day I was forced to exhausting “prayers” and self-flagellations.

In the many centuries of her history, the Church has supported a patriarchal vision of the world that has favored diversified forms of submission, enslavement, exploitation, discrimination of women, inside and outside the Church. Even today, after the small-big achievements of feminist theologians since the 70s, the sexist mentality and theology made of stereotypes and prejudices continue to lurk in the folds of ecclesiastical structures, producing gender violence, especially against the most fragile people. Despite some timid steps forward in Pope Francis’ recognition of the dignity of women, the day when the Church will recognize its sin of indifference, silence and occasional complicity with its male-centric structures, still seems far away. On August 2, 2022, ADISTA reported the news of 43 courageous Latin American women who dared to denounce abuses of “human trafficking, exploitation and enslavement” carried out by the powerful Opus Dei. Reading the details, it is hard to believe that it happened at this time.

## BIBLE VERSE

“Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)” (Ephesians 5, 8–9)

## COMMENT

Jesus’ mandate to “go and preach the gospel to every creature” is manifested in the service of God and neighbour. “The service” is realized in making the light of Christ and his fruits of goodness, justice and truth visible to the world! If the social reality still highlights today in 2022 attitudes of exploitation and gender discrimination, inside and outside the Church, means that we are called to

behave as children of light, by the authority given to us by God; we have the urgent need to continue, without tiring, not to stand still in comfortable silence to oppose, break down, overcome all forms of violence.

## PRAYER

*In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask you Lord to sustain and accompany us in the work you have entrusted to us. Make us worthy to be your daughters of light capable of spreading to the world your true message of love, justice and truth. Amen*

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## QUESTION to discuss

Why so much contempt and exploitation by christian religious men against women?

9-10

DECEMBER 2022

# The femicide last stage of violence



@shamsiahassani

**87**:Guglielmina, Franca, Nadia, Simona, Silvana, Maria, Alessia, Alexandra and many others are the women who died by femicide. From January 6 to October 25, 2022 (two days ago as we are writing) If you then browse through the places where these femicides took place, there is no place or region that is saved. Small towns, cities, all throughout the national territory.

Yet, in 2013 Italy adhered with a law to the Istanbul Convention that gave indications and methods to overcome the issue of violence in Europe. The key point of collaboration that the States had to establish with the anti-violence centers run by women.

In Italy this is only partially achieved, the funding of anti-violence centers is constantly at risk, the training provided to raise awareness among law enforcement agencies, social structures and health facilities is increasingly lacking, but above all is the judicial system which is divided between criminal and civil that behaves in a seriously inconsistent manner and that puts women's lives at risk.

Too often the sentence of civil separation, which follows a criminal judgment of guilt, provides for the shared custody of minors. In deciding it, the civil courts do not take into account all the judicial path that women have

taken to get out of violence, but rely on psychological counselors who believe that mothers suffer from "malicious mother syndrome".

Forcing parents to maintain contact puts the lives of women and children at risk in many cases. And too often it is difficult to quickly overturn these judgments.

## BIBLE VERSE

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20,17)*

## COMMENT

How many times do we have to read again that a man kills "his woman" because she has distanced herself from him or in another way has escaped from his dominion. The woman as property. As the 10 commandments suggest. However, there is now a long history of the biblical and theological interpretation of certain parts of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in which this concept of property is questioned or in which it is highlighted that it is not part of the liberating message. But for this we must not remove these verses, they must remain, they must be there to denounce a violent practice. It is true, even if it seems the opposite, today there is less violence, but it has often become more sneaky. As then, women are killed today because they are seen as something that can be disposed of according to one's own feelings. But all of us are not the property of anyone. Even God has given us freedom, not to do what we please, but to be responsible people for one another. We are called to be free from impulses that at first can keep us chained. We are called to be free from impulses that can keep us chained at first

## PRAYER

*We pray that the voices of battered women will be heard, that meaningful actions and changes will take place in the treatment of women in all areas of society. Amen.*

## QUESTION to discuss

How to force men to overcome their desires for revenge?