

Some points on "SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO A WOMEN'S MOVEMENT"



1. Questions raised

In the "spontaneous reactions" some points were raised concerning the reality of the Grail as a women's movement in the present conditions of our time. Opinions are certainly not unanimous and here are some examples:

"Is there such a thing as the role of woman? It seems to be submerging under the more general title of Christian to such an extent that it is a subject that is hardly raised. I feel strongly that even though woman's role may have been over-stressed at one point, it is still essential to us and of an increasingly vital interest to women all over the world."

"Is the woman an essential element in the Grail or a characteristic stemming from the needs of the particular period of history when the Grail came into being?"

"We must reconsider our understanding of the Grail as a woman's movement. It should probably continue to be so, but the emphasis on the singular and unique role of woman seems no longer appropriate."

"Do women have a particular spiritual mission different from men's? What is the justification for a movement of women?"

In these examples, there are questions which are beyond the scope of a sociological study. They will be dealt with separately. Our aim with this study seems to me a fresh approach to the status and role of women in society. We won't take for granted that woman has a different role from man but we will try to see if sociology points out to a specific role. And, if so, which are the features of such a role.

2. Some references

The amount of bibliography in this field is enormous. I only point out here to what seems to me either more comprehensive or bringing new perspectives into the whole question. (May I also remind you of the bibliography on pg. 5-6 of the Grail Documentation Bulletin, from January 1963.)

A. Revue Internationale du Travail
B.I.T. Genève

Practically all the monthly issues of this periodical have a good article on woman and work.

B. Documents from the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women

These are working documents for the yearly sessions of the Commission, covering practically all the fields of the presence



of women in society, from education to politics.

C. Bibliography on "image and role":

- Friedan, Betty - "The feminine mystique"
Norton, N.Y., 1963
- Gossman, Elisabeth - "Das Bild der Frau heute"
Dusseldorf, 1962
- Chombart de Lauwe et alii
- "La femme dans la société (son image dans
différents milieux sociaux)"
C.N.R.S., Paris, 1963
- UNESCO
- "Images de la femme dans la société (enquête
internationale)"
Revue internationale des Sciences Sociales,
vol. XIV, n.1, 1962, 178 pg.

D. Special issues of periodicals

- Femmes 1963 - Perspectives socialistes
n. 55, dec, 1962
- La femme dans la
société moderne - Echanges
n. 58, Nov. 1962
- La femme et le travail - Esprit
Mai 1961
- La difficulté d'être femme
- document "vie nouvelle"
1964

3. Possible fields for research

We certainly cannot tackle at once all the aspects of the presence and condition of women in society-- certain choice is necessary. It seems to me that there are a few preliminary points which could eventually be considered as fields of research in the first phase of our work. (Later on, they can be used as "tools" in further research on more concrete aspects.)

These preliminary points are the following:

- . growing interest in the 60s for the question of woman in society
- Periodicals (like those in D.) and books that have appeared since 1960 on different aspects of woman and society;
- careful examination of these publications - to what are they pointing out? what kind of questions are they raising? what kind of assumptions do they take for granted?



- is it possible to draw up a sort of profile of the problematic of woman in society?
- . interplay of role of woman and environning culture
 - the first thing to do seems to me the analysis of the main arguments of Simone de Beauvoir in her fundamental assertion that a woman is not born as a woman ~~\$\$\$~~ but that she becomes so through the influence of the environning culture;
 - in his chapter in "Lafemme, nature et vocation", Fr. Tilliette makes a reasonably good picture of the influence of the predominant philosophical trend in each time on the understanding of the role of woman;
 - would it be possible from all this to detect which are the key situations that bring more light into the condition of woman and into her status? would it be her relation to family? her relation to work?
- . images of woman and her role
 - this is a particular aspect of the previous point, but it has become an autonomous field of research in the last few years as seen in C.; it is very important to clear up the whole mechanism between the image and role so that we can easily understand the dynamism inherent to a sociological concept of role at any moment;
 - in this very dinamism is there some continuity on the basis of something acquired at every stage of the evolution of society? or is the role something entirely new at every stage? in other words, does the image take root into a well-known reality ?

The analysis of the 3 points just mentioned may give us the necessary elements to formulate then our basic questions and to situate them in the adequate sociological framework:

- Is it possible to draw out from the contemporary phenomena in society any lines concerning an eventual nature of woman and her role in the world?
- Do we see emerging from our time any particular approach of women to life?
- Is this approach reinforced or made more fruitful through the association of women?

4. Nature and role of woman

Keeping in mind the kind of "tools" referred to in point 3., it would be good to investigate if there is a certain trend or underlying force pushing women in some particular directions.

Work and profession :

- what is the distribution of the women labour power since the beginning of the century in the largely

- industrialized countries? which fluctuations? because of what?
- what types of professions are most and freely chosen by women? what are the real accomplishments of women in those professions? (interesting would be, for instance, to see the presence of women among the technical assistance experts from the United Nations Agencies)
 - is there a clear preference or trend from women to certain fields? do these fields point out to a common denominator of interests and aptitudes among women?
 - the study of the extreme situations would be particularly enlightening, namely, in reference to Soviet Union and to the new developping countries.

Civil services:

- what has been the task of women in the civil service?
- what about political life as such? in the countries where absolute equality between the sexes has been achieved is there any visible trend regarding the contribution of women to the political life?
- what is the influence of the feminine vote in the orientation of contemporary society? (does the feminine vote tend to preserve certain values or situations or is it particularly innovator?)

Community life (including family)

- is there any link between the communal forms of life and the presence of woman?
- which are the significant changes in these forms of life? what is the interplay between these changes and the image of woman society has?
- what is the place of community (including family) in the striving for personal fulfillment among women?

5. Meaning of the association of women

- a. concrete organizations of women - study their form, their purpose, the types of action they are undertaking; trying to see if there is anything common among all of them;
- b. meetings, seminars, etc., of women - their themes, how they have developped through the last twenty years (for instance, is there a shifting from the fight for rights to a more positive affirmation of women as such and of their concern for environning society?)
- c. potential force of women today - growing awareness of the existence of such a potential and its unlimited possibilities for the shaping of the world.

