

## "Visioning the Future"

### 1. Women, as "guardians of the threshold"

1.1 A few years ago, I was in California visiting the atelier of Françoise Gilot, a great painter who was married to Picasso.

One painting captured my imagination and is still with me as an icon of what we are talking about this morning:

"women visioning the future".

One very simple house - it could be in North Africa or in the South of Europe - stood there with its white walls against a landscape of colours so warm, between red and orange and ocre, that you could sense the heat.

The door of the house stood wide open. From the interior of the house came a striking light, refreshing, bright, showing nothing but itself.

Next to the door, outside the house, seating on a bench, two women. They were not talking, just there, immensely dignified, carrying in them, in their posture, a history of millions of women.

Their faces were not clear: they could be any woman, every woman. And then the title of the painting:

"the guardians of the threshold".

This is the vision that is going to guide me through what I will say this morning: women bearing the heat of the day, calm, together, indicating by their presence the light inside, vigilant towards that door that must be kept open:

women as guardians of the threshold of the future.

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### 1.2 Which future?

We all know from experience how the future is unpredictable.

The changes that have taken place in our lifetime have left us often bewildered and in wonder.

Bewildered by the acceleration of events and ideas,

in science and technology,  
in economics and politics,  
in values and societal changes.

In wonder too, as we are caught between the infinity great: the universe, and the infinitely small: all the tools of informatics. What is most extraordinary: that men and women go to the outer space or that all the information is kept in a miniaturized space?

Very often, we take all those changes for granted. However, they mean a shift in our terms of reference, in the tools of analysis available. So much so that it is clear today that forecasting/ planning/ designing the future is a plunge into the unknown.



Because our civilization has entered a totally new period, a period of intense complexity. This means that life, history, are now made by autonomous systems which are interdependent. (Imagine a "mobile" of endless pieces and you have the picture of the world!)

Everything is connected with everything else.

This fact is in itself a tremendous challenge: there is no possibility to hide from it, we have to face the continuous movement in which we are caught, just because we are alive!

It is

- . a time of uncertainty - which means living with probabilities,
- . a time of turbulence - no instruments to tell you the way ahead (tempest of a clear sky),
- . a time of incoherence - where often aspirations and activities do not integrate with each other.

In other terms, a time of unceasing adventure and learning and creating anew.

It is my conviction that, in their own way, women know how to live through such complexity. Lives lived with uncertainties of all kinds, shaken by events so often unexpected, caught up in divergent and opposing tasks and responsibilities. And yet, women coped with that complexity.

Isn't there, from the outset, the richness of women's culture that is going to help us to vision the future, to help to shape it, and, when it comes, to move through it with courage, intelligence and wisdom?

I do believe that Christian women together can then contribute to a future in which we may pray, without hypocrisy, "May Thy Kingdom come"

Because the Kingdom of God is "the reconciliation from within" of all things of this world and its history.

Because between the Kingdom of God and the world and its history "there is a unity of purpose".

The Christian is there to make that unity viable and visible.

And yet at the same time, we all know deep down - most of us having lived already the greatest portion of our life - that what we can achieve is very little.

Last year in Seoul, South Korea, a friend of mine translated into English a great Korean poet, Ku Sang.

One of his poems speaks of that awareness:

"In the fields flowers bloom.  
In the fields young sprouts appear.  
In the fields leaves unfold.  
In the fields fruits ripen.  
In the fields, what can we do?  
All we can do is run errands."

Let us then speak of some of the most urgent "errands" for the future.



2. First errand

We are facing the rebellion of nature at world level.

For centuries, nature and history seemed to have nothing in common, except when big natural disasters or plagues disturbed the course of events.

With the birth of industrialization, nature has entered history.

In the first stages, the exploitation of natural resources to feed the process of industrialization, and later, the disorder created in nature by huge human settlements and their wastes.

However, this encounter of nature and history was not understood in all its consequences. But today we know.

For the first time, history - political management, economic and social development, international relations - have to take nature into account.

Successive high levels meetings - Brundtland report, Toronto Summit, Hague Conference - have been steps in defining the necessary measures

- . in order to prevent climate warming and the depletion of the ozone layer
- . and fundamentally, in order to render the earth habitable and to preserve the diversity, harmony and beauty of all life-systems.

All this underlines the interlinkage between nature and all the other political/economic/social processes and specially of science and technology.

There is a need for a complete change of paradigm: science was supposed to contain within itself its own self-correction. It came from the idea of an endless progress.

Today we know that science need to be guided by values which stand above and before it.

As women, what do we have to say?

Women and nature had been assimilated to each other for a long time. Let us then today change a handicap into and asset. (Women's conference in Florida).

Let us take all the consequences of what is so embedded in women's culture, namely the primacy of life :

- ask before any technological device enters the market, before the licence for its production is given:
  - . what for?
  - . which needs are answered?
  - . are they serving human values?
- defend the right to life of future generations by thinking of what will happen in the medium and long term.

Let us also see in the environment the contextual metaphor of our lives: the interconnectedness of all things and events.

Indeed, you cannot deal with environment if you don't challenge basic premisses in all fields of life.

The United States of America gave 2.5 per cent of their GNP to finance the Marshall Plan after World War II, just to reconstruct Europe.

What is at stake now is much more important, universal, vital for the future!

Should not women push for that?

I think that we must.

Because we connect  
we represent a hidden force in society  
we go beyond all kinds of boundaries.

(A) 3. Second errand: "The market economy"

With the collapse of communism, we see the globalization of the market system and of its financial and trade pillars. It is reinforced by the magic appeal it has for peoples of Central and Eastern Europe.

However, this globalization has put more sharply in the limelight the shortcomings of the market:

- the "free" market is a fallacy: it is not truly free at the world level; most countries enter international trade under the heavy and unbearable conditions put on it by the rich countries which can play at ease with their protectionist measures (80 per cent of international trade among EEC/USA/Japan)!
- international financial credit system is such that many countries are paying back not only more than their GNP but also more than the amount of the total loan!
- direct investments by transnational corporations go mainly to the North, 50 per cent to USA while the 20 per cent to the South concentrate on only ten countries!
- the flux of capital is such that we have to wipe out the idea of "development aid": money is not moving North to South but rather South to North; in the last eight years, more than 300 billion US dollars came from Latin America to the North!

Let us call things for what they are:

the market system, as it is now, has created an organized international disorder. It is a massive injustice. It is pure materialism as it disregards anything - action, good, service - that cannot be translated into money.

The philosophy at the heart of it seems to be initiative and risk - which are important values of a dynamic society.

But there is more to it: there is the acceptance of exclusion as a legitimate social and political principle.

The pure logic of the market system as it exists is "to empower the strong at the expense of the weak, vulnerable or disorganized". (Alt. 310)

Therefore it assumes as right a philosophy of "inequality among human beings".

The "Order of Force" which was predominant during the Cold War period has been replaced by the "Order of Money".

A massive movement of desire for consumption dominates all attempts for reform everywhere in the world.





If nothing is done, life for some will become a homogeneous culture driven by consumer's desires while the overwhelming majority of humankind will die of destitution.

Women are at the crossroads of the market system, in two ways:

For their flexibility in patterns of work, compatibility between different types of responsibility (in the work place and in relation to family), mobility in inter and intra occupations have to become essential ingredients.

As it happens, this is also in our time demanded by the economics of the end of the State intervention.

Let us then use well and for the right purposes what comes within the logic of the market itself!

Suggestion of 1 per cent GNP as a conditionality for voting in the UN (Bob McNamara)

Secondly, women are the most powerful agents of consumption.

They can counteract the perverse effect of publicity (creating passive persons who unconsciously obey to its suggestions) by becoming lucid agents of consumption.

They can then fulfill an economic function, capable of regulating the predominant model of "always more".

They can be at the source of authentically redistributive mechanisms to compensate for the market paradigm of basic inequality.

By assuming these tasks women will reverse the trend:

- instead of allowing humankind to be at the service of economy they will contribute to put economy where it should be: at the service of human beings.

If the "Order of Money", the reign of the market, will be producing "new consumer products" to satisfy the rising demands of hyper-individualism, where do we stand as Christian women?

A new scriptural understanding and praxis has to accompany our lives. Nothing is as clear as the criteria given by the Gospel:

" I was hungry and you gave me to eat  
I was thirsty and you gave me to drink  
I was naked and you clothed me (Mt 25, 35-36)

But also a more vehement action where we are. Small projects of development may be a good/satisfactory goal for a while but they are not enough in the present world disorder.

Christian women have to stand up for justice, including the justice that will make their own lives more difficult. Isn't this the idea behind the story told by the Gospel when Christ says about the poor widow:

"she of her want did cast in all she had, even all her living."  
(Marc, 12, 44)

4. Third errand: "Governance"

The questions I have been raising pertain to politics or, rather, to "governance", to the art and science of  
giving direction,  
creating the right institutions  
determining the legislative framework.

The new questions of governance range from the local/national level to the world level.

Though the movement towards democracy is one of the most important factors of our time, democracy has to be re-invented.

There is a growing uneasiness with our traditional democratic norms in the North hemisphere:

- the separatedness of political thinking;
- the mystification of political action;
- the acceptance of injustice and exclusion under the disguise of pragmatism;
- the submission of politics to economics;
- the pompous rhetoric of the political class;
- the dubious ties kept with the media;
- the paraphernalia wrapping up the political functions ...;
- the laws of the internal functioning of the political institutions, with their dogmas, codes and liturgies.

New social actors have to participate in the decision-making process.

Where there are human beings, services and institutions, there are political issues.

This is why the school, the hospital, the public services of all kinds, the media, should all be able to be consulted on the issues concerning them.

Our experience as women tells us too that there are many more instances of power than those offered by the political institutions.

By making such situations more visible

women can help to reconstitute power to everyone in society,  
they do empower others,  
(mostly those whose voice is not heard).

The manifold tasks of women, the way in which women's culture has integrated such tasks, give to care and responsibility in politics a new dimension.

At the same time, it is a help for the socio-political reality to organize itself around new issues and with the participation of new actors.

## 5. New World Order

The uneasiness with the political institutions is of wider consequences at the international level.

We see now that the collapse of Soviet Union gave rise to a uni-polar world.

A new world order which will be hegemonic won't be any "order". Because, in spite of many blunders and shortcomings, one idea has been acquired:

"an international order has to be based on the equal dignity of all political entities".

Somehow this hegemonic tendency is born out of the globalization of all issues.

To create a multi-polar world which will deal with the globalization of the peace and security process is an imperative task. A multi-polar world geared, at every instance, to the rights of individuals and people and to the enhancement of their solidarity.

At the dawn of the XXI century, the women's movement remains, rather can become,  
the most international of all social movements.

- Women's movement,  
based on women's culture,  
can give an irreplaceable contribution,
- to help the world to speak and to organize itself beyond one's own region, nation, ethnic group;
  - to give room to a sense of "we" that encompasses a plurality of situations, convictions, attitudes;
  - to underline the transnational character of all initiatives, however local they may be, as the best way to express the interdependence of today's world.

We need to build totally anew the concepts of security and defence.

As women, we have to come to grips with the rationale, the tools and the systems necessary as "weapons" for peace. (nations in the making in Eastern Europe).

Women's culture of care and connectedness is needed to create the bridges among ethnic groups, to accelerate the formation of nations, to relativise the importance of the State as it evolved in Europe in the last 200 years.

Moreover, if peace and war is too serious to be left in the hands of generals, it is even more serious to be left in the hands of politicians.

What then?

I have a dream. There are people speaking and writing about peace. Couldn't we get all these people together, give them means to work a global strategy for peace? This could be a new Manhattan-project - not designed for war but for peace.





6. The future is today

How different the future can be!

Incarnation is the capture of a segment of history as one's own time.

We can even say that

"the fear to live fully in our time leads us away from eternity,  
while the will to live the time in its density roots us in  
eternity".

To vision the future

is to grop for eternity  
is to march towards eternity.

To vision the future

is to see the things that are there already,  
that speak already of the future.

To vision the future

is to acknowledge that sometimes things are unclear,  
that invention waits for us,  
patiently craddled in the right time.

To vision the future

is to reach out to where my beeing is not yet,  
knowing that the future is in the star I cannot see because its  
light didn't cover yet the distance to the earth.

In a much simpler way,

a contemporary Portuguese poet said what I would love to share with you in  
our common visioning of the future:

"Everything from the future is there already  
but not my footsteps, nor my arms.  
So I walk and walk  
because there is a gap between everything and me,  
and in that gap I walk and find my way.  
But between me and my footsteps,  
there is also a gap;  
So I invent my footsteps and my way."

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

St. Louis, Missouri, 12 November 1991