

Feminity in Men *

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Unilateral understandings and actions are often present in our lives. For example, in informal conversations it is felt that men treasure autonomy, and it is said that women establish more bonds. What happens among persons has to consider many factors in everyday life, and take into account scientific inquiries. There is a growing concern for the personal, historical, wholistic meanings of masculinity (that include feminity in men's existence). A major goal today is 'being human in relationships'.

There are plenty of immediate connections, but few real bonds. Individuals and communities are often placed against each other. Personal characteristics unravel in local and global settings. Contemporary technology often turns us away from cultural roots and spiritualities of the Earth.

A huge distance appears between others and me. This is underlined by an outstanding poet and bishop in Brazil, Pedro Casaldaliga:

“between you and me,

there is distance: I.

However, there is a bridge...:

the two of us.”¹

In today's pos-modern context it has become difficult to nurture relationships. It is painful how each 'I' is unable to acknowledge and encounter others. Whoever is different usually is discriminated. Moreover, many males feel their feminity is not meaningful, rather that it is threatening. In general terms, we are jailed to patterns of western masculine

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¹ See P. Casaldaliga, *Todavía estas palabras*, Estella: Verbo Divino, 1989.

superiority. In ethical terms, androcentrism (and anthropocentric behavior) is a widespread sinful attitude. The I-You dichotomy seems to support masculine aversion towards the feminine in each human being.

Throughout this brief essay, gender concerns are seen according to my particular experience; everyday patterns are questioned; the feminine and masculine are re-examined. These concerns have a goal: the struggle to be fully human.

Before examining these realities, allow me to briefly mention great obstacles. In terms of methodology, one common difficulty is being unilateral and unable to engage with other hermeneutics. For example, when 'being more human' is segregated from environment and ecology. Another obstacle lies in pos-modern categories which tend to be more subjective/cultural and are less socio-political. Some researchers fall into conceptual traps: the masculine and the feminine are seen as essences. Our opinions are framed by stereotypes: male are more rational, women are mostly emotional; masculinity is strong and femininity is weak; sexuality is confused with gender; homosexuality is seen as sickness or as feminine; tenderness is considered non-masculine, etc. Other difficulties are to see all of feminism as one reality; or to only consider 'machismo' and to neglect major obstacles such as patriarchy, kyriarchy, androcentrism.

As it happens in other realms, masculine and feminine dimensions require plenty of critical and constructive dialogue². One has to acknowledge ambivalence, subordination, structural injustice, forms of social and religious evil (and even of idolatry). On another part, human well-being happens through sexuality, relationships, pleasure, responsibility and power from below, masculine and feminine gender. A constructive approach also includes spiritual, political, ethical, dimensions of living out the Gospel and of church renewal. My points of view arise from masculine and heterosexual understandings. Its focus is not gender *per se*, but rather paths towards freedom and towards being human in harmony with the Earth. All know that there are other valid approaches. Each person speaks from experienced frameworks, and hopefully from concrete care for life.

² Since 'feminine' usually refers to characteristics peculiar to women, in this essay I use the noun: 'femininity' in men (others prefer 'femininity'). It deals with dimensions in men (formula in Spanish: 'lo femenino en el varón'). It does not mean an essence, but rather refers to socio-social experience and wisdom.

1) Disestablishment and correlation.

Women's social and cultural initiatives have direct or indirect influence in daily feelings and actions of men. When one interacts with women who exercise their rights and capabilities, and have strong identities, one has to accept facts. At the same time, in an explicit or mostly an implicit way, men appreciate global expansion of women's rights and leaderships. This is unsettling. Often it becomes like an earthquake. One is disestablished and insecure, and is removed from situations of privilege. For many men it is painful; and for some of us it is also challenging and liberating. One begins to draw away from patriarchal status quo. Most men belong to marginal social-cultural strata, and so have their particular experiences and reactions, in comparison with those of us who are in the middle class or in affluent levels of power³.

It is significant how many latinamerican men feel left on the sidelines, when women are empowered by their own efforts, have more economic and educational tools, organize public and private events, carry out their forms of leadership. Some begin to ask gender-questions. This helps men to cease acting as in charge of everything, and to no longer claim ownership over other persons. One can leave aside phantasies of control over the world. In a positive way, latinamerican men are moving towards reciprocity, collaboration, tolerance with different kinds of persons. Some are able to step down from pyramids of power. These changes include transforming simple tasks, everyday rituals, and even religious traditions.

Here I mention three types of changes, that include healing experiences, where several persons and also myself have been involved⁴. During several years, men and women, married and single, indigenous and mestizo, have been developing workshops so as to rediscover gender roles and spiritualities. Each one of us has been shaken in

³ This essay reflects mostly experiences of men in professional and middle social sectors. Other voices and essays deal with data about middle class and poor men, masculinity among different social groups. See Gabriela Rotondi, *Pobreza y masculinidad* (Buenos Aires: Espacio, 2000, 59-132), José Olavarria, *¿Hombres a la deriva?* (Santiago: FLACSO, 2001, 89-108), Rafael Montesinos, *Las rutas de la masculinidad* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2002) who deals with the Mexican context.

⁴ Having gender workshops, restructuring working conditions, and new understanding of Mary, have been key moments in my long journey in Peru; this allowed me to write "Del androcentrismo a la relacionalidad", *Anales de la Sociedad Chilena de Teología* (Santiago, SCT, 2001, 135-150), and also *Felicidad masculina: una propuesta ética* (Chucuito, Peru: IDEA, 2002).

convictions and in forms of correlation. Moreover, in terms of daily tasks, our institution decided to no longer have a woman-secretary nor a person to do cleaning, preparation of coffee breaks, etc.; rather we have begun to share such tasks among all, men and women. In terms of our biblical and theological formation, instead of seeing Mary's role as complement to Christ's saving mission, andean communities have been rediscovering being disciples like Mary, and giving witness of Love in both masculine and feminine imagery. As men, it has been a healing experience to rediscover companionship with the prophet of Galilee (and not pretend ownership of truth and morality). These and other experiences have disestablished many of us, and have allowed a healthy attitude towards oneself and others. It has also opened up wholistic sensibilities and actions.

Therefore, significant transformation has not been due to ideas; rather it comes forth through reciprocity (and not competition) among men, personal experiences, correlation with women who have gender strategies and disrupt the status quo. Neither femininity nor masculinity are unmovable essences. Rather a person wishes to be free with others, interacting in the midst of different realities, and having an open approach towards gender⁵. One becomes uneasy when there is superiority of one over others, and when dualistic patterns become sacred. A challenging process of disestablishment allows men to be more humanly healthy, and also to interact with the 'otherness' of femininity. This includes unraveling prejudices about what is 'feminine' in the human condition.

Correlation and collaboration are certainly challenging goals. Concerning femininity within ourselves ¿what happens? What often stands out are everyday tasks such as fathers taking care of children, cooking, concrete social responsibilities, collaboration with women in leadership roles, sharing with a woman-partner in a family. The bottom line is acceptance of the 'other' and collaboration, between men and women, and us men being

⁵ Francisco Reyes underlines urgent interdisciplinary consideration (among ethnic, gender, age groups, etc.) of masculinity (see his *Otra masculinidad posible*, Bogotá: Dimensión Educativa, 2003) which is carried out by persons "comprometidos con la necesidad de construir un mundo realmente justo" (pg. 30). Concerning the masculine/feminine correlation it is dynamic and comprehensive; nothing is excluded. According to Beatrice Bruteau and Felicity Edwards, what we have is an "energizing polarity"; the masculine in each person is "specialized, analytical, focused", and the feminine is "general, intuitive, holistic" (F. Edwards, "Spirituality, Consciousness, Gender Identification: a neo-feminist perspective", in Ursula King, *Religion and Gender*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 181-182). She speaks against the popular (and false) polarization.

persons and not authoritarian figures with unjust power over everyone else. Decent communication and interaction is a starting point; the general goal is correlation in society, at home, in church and educational contexts. Correlation takes place in private and public spaces, between different kinds of persons with specific gender contributions (and limitations). The socio-economic dimension of interaction goes together with emotional and spiritual correlation. In these areas, as a man one has to honestly examine the impact of patriarchal and androcentric evils. Moreover one has to avoid rhetoric (‘others are machistas, but not me, since I help at home’), and avoid lack of accountability.

This implies a type of asceticism, which goes into the deeper layers of consciousness and of relationships. One disagrees with hegemonic forms of being ‘macho’, one is a rebel, and confronts violent cultural forms. A person develops new attitudes, and experiences loving reciprocity. In terms of the Gospel, one goes through a conversion experience, a *metanoia*, and is thankful as a new creature within the body of Christ.

We have in mind how Jesus dealt with both men and women, drawing them away from the idolatry of power. Therefore, being today disciples of Jesus is quite demanding. As men and women were touched and freed by the prophet of Nazaret, so today we are called to be more human and faithful to the Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit is the source of correlation, reciprocity, unconditional love. The Spirit moves us so that all -and primarily the poor- may have life in abundance. Obviously this means moving away from oppressive forms of masculinity. What is most importante is a daily and institutional positive reconstruction of masculinity. This includes acceptance of feminine dimensions. It is like being born again. Masculine arrogance is left behind, and the road ahead is one of correlation and unending learning of what is different. Thus, in terms of gender, persons walk with the Risen Lord.

2) Appraisal of femininity.

Among men it is often said (or presupposed) that characteristics of women and of the feminine are difficult to understand. It is often reduced to emotional categories, to stereotyped (and subordinate) roles, to what the media introduces in our imagination, to the complexity of personal interactions with women. It certainly benefits everyone to move

beyond stereotypes and unilateral analysis; and to be able to see both femininity and masculinity in terms of sico-social experiences that are open to many understandings.

During these last decades, gender perspectives and persons doing feminist hermeneutics have explored crucial questions and developed deep concerns. Significant steps are being taken by some men. Feminine characteristics are being examined by literature, anthropology, psychology, politics, economics, theology. Much may be learned from Jungian research, and from work done in Latin America by Humberto Maturana, Jose Olavarria, Leonardo Boff, Edenio Valle, Hugo Caceres, Francisco Reyes (and others). Insights and research done by these (and other) experts have to be highlighted and sincerely thanked. One becomes aware of being theoretically ignorant, and discovers new questions in the open fields of gender. There is a need for unceasing interdisciplinary reflection. Epistemological knots need to be untied. One has to address discrimination and aggression towards women; which often goes hand in hand with homophobia. Prejudices also need to be resolved; for example, focusing on caricatures such as being 'where they belong', 'pretty and non conflictive', 'doing what women have to do'.

Everyone is aware that masculinity and femininity are framed by culture, sexuality, age, social standards, family upbringing, local and regional context, subjective and emotional paradigms. Moreover, it is easily seen how femininity belongs mostly to women, and that masculinity is mainly present in men. Therefore, essential categories (masculinity *per se*, femininity *per se*) seem unreal. What is evident is the existence of dominant forms in each context, marginal manifestations, and also resistance to the status quo and liberating forms. These and other phenomena require constant discussion. Here more attention is given to femininity within men and to understandings of masculinity. (It would also be good to examine aggressive jokes and stereotypes about women and men; this is not done here).

Since the focus is on masculine understandings of gender and on femininity as a positive and challenging dimension ¿how is it acknowledged among church people and among theologians? How open are men to questions about patriarchy and homophobia? In each context, how are dehumanizing factors confronted by tasks of justice and peace? In terms of gender, what is today's meaning of liberation? These and other questions are often

not taken care of. It can be honestly acknowledged among us. (These difficulties are present throughout my life; something similar may be happening in other men).

This essay focuses not only on dominant phenomena, but also on alternative roads. It is difficult to accept what is different, and not easy to explain femininity in one's experience. It is unacceptable whatever endangers our machista superiority, and whatever makes us lose control over others. If one wishes to be at peace with oneself, one has to overcome masculine fear of partnership and of losing grounds (of privilege and power), since a male obsession is to be always ahead of others. Contemporary mythology overemphasises the 'I', a masculine ego that is rationalistic and in charge of the world. This of course draws us apart from fellow men (who lack power that few of us have), alienates us from the natural environment, and harms feminine characteristics. At the beginning of this essay, Pedro Casaldaliga reminded us that 'You' and 'I' are segregated because of an egocentric approach to life. Deep down in contemporary phantasies there is an absolute 'I', and a radical distance towards the other. This requires disestablishment, and conversion to reciprocity, so that 'others' are meaningful and loved.

A Jungian perspective is an eye opener. In men and women archetypes have different impacts. Heloisa Cardoso explains cultural and unconscious factors: *anima* (in men) and *animus* (in women). These hypothesis of *anima* and *animus* are very helpful; they are not essences. Cardoso writes that Jung has not "explained the meaning ... of masculine and of feminine characteristics"⁶. On another part, Walter Boechat considers that Jung mainly considers such principles in terms of gender, and not in terms of 'individuation'⁷. One can also add that such realities are neither unchangeable nor ahistorical. Jung's reflections are eye openers, since men resist *anima* that "represents the unconscious with dynamics and contents that have been excluded from conscious existence"⁸. A Jungian

⁶ H. Cardoso, "O homem: sua alma, sua anima" in W. Boechat, *O masculino em questão*, Petrópolis: Vozes, 1997, 63. She also comments how Jung places *logos* as conscious principle of men, and *eros* as psychic conscience in women. Being principles and archetypes, they do not have "essential" meanings.

⁷ See W. Boechat, pgs. 18 y 20.

⁸ C.G. Jung, *Psicología y Religión*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1961, 123. See also C.G. Jung, G. Adler, R Hull, *Aspects of the Feminine*, Princeton: U. of Princeton, 1982; C.G. Jung *Tipos Psicológicos*, Barcelona: Edhasa, 2008. *Anima* is like a feminine personification of the unconscious archetype in men; as Jung explains "the unconscious transmits an archetypal representation which must not be confused with an archetype in itself"

perspective helps to see men's femininity as a thrust to be more human and less dualistic. Such theoretical contributions provide us with keys that open doors into subjective, interactive, and spiritual realities that are often concealed and marginalized⁹.

Let us now move into another area: masculine sensibility and thinking. One regrets that sensuous and corporal dimensions are usually left out of male rationality. This often happens within mainline Christianity and in its socio-cultural activities. Thus, it is important to be renewed by our faith tradition in the Incarnation and the Resurrection of the Body, and to listen anew to what the Spirit says to the Church.

Christian renewal is rooted in Jesus' person and message that give priority to concrete bodies of humanity. This priority is manifested in the Beatitudes and in numerous healing narratives. As it is well known (due to biblical work throughout the world and also in Latin America¹⁰), the *rabbi* of Nazareth, in his interaction with male disciples made no room for superiority and hegemony over other human beings. Rather, Jesus insisted on healing bodies (and did not take care of 'souls'). The prophet of Nazareth was a pilgrim on the road and not a landowner, a servant and not a master, and was among the 'little ones' of the Kingdom of God (Mc 9:33-7, Lk 9:46-48, Mt 18:1-4). In Jesus' experience and ministry, transcendence happens in the midst of concrete humanity and the natural environment.

The gospel message is lived out with feminine qualities and meanings, such as table fellowship, healing of suffering, trust in God, love beyond power structures. Transcendence is present through images and interactions: a father embracing the 'lost' son, a woman baking bread, feminine parables of the Kingdom, the last supper including washing the feet of disciples. God is a savior through mercy; and this benefits the down trodden, the sick,

(*Arquetipos e inconsciente colectivo*, Barcelona: Paidós, 1997, 158). Therefore, there is no need to consider such representations as "essences".

⁹ See interdisciplinary works of Edenio Valle, *Psicología e experiencia religiosa* (Sao Paulo: Loyola, 1997), Mauro Amatuzy (org.), *Psicología e espiritualidade* (Sao Paulo: Paulus, 2005), and a series of enlightened workshops in Brazil's Conference of Religious: *Genero e poder na vida religiosa; Sexualidade; Genero, Identidade e vida religiosa; Masculino e Feminino* (Sao Paulo: Loyola, 1999, 2000).

¹⁰ Jesus' masculinity is thoroughly examined by peruvian Hugo Cáceres, *Jesús el varón. Aproximación bíblica a su masculinidad* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 2011), by colombian Francisco Reyes, *Otra masculinidad posible* (Bogotá: Dimensión Educativa, 2003, 85-112); also by the outstanding biblical theologian: Jose Antonio Pagola, *Jesús, aproximación histórica* (Madrid: PPC, 2007, 211-236).

the excluded (like children, women, foreigners, pagans, ‘sinners’). This shows forth feminine wisdom that promotes inclusivity, tender correlation, option for justice. There are many signs that Jesus shared these kinds of wisdom.

¿What happens in masculine understandings of life? They may follow a stereotyped androcentric pattern, or they may be in dialogue with other men and women. Unfortunately, many of us have been trained to distrust feminine intuition and knowledge (expressed by women, and partially within men’s experience). A terrible division is often made between either thinking like men or feeling like women.

In the midst of debates, extraordinary insights are given in Chile by Humberto Maturana and Ximana Dávila, and in Brazil by Leonardo Boff, Rose Marie Muraro, Lucia Ribeiro. For example, the biologist and philosopher Maturana acknowledges how “Ximena Dávila contributes to deepen my understanding of relational dynamics that intertwines the Biology of Knowledge with the Biology of Love... (and later adds) ... this understanding allows persons -who suffer- to rediscover the path towards self-respect”¹¹. It seems to me that this is a good example of how a man does not incorporate a women into his interests, but rather that masculine and feminine kinds of wisdom are weaved together. In concrete forms knowledge springs forth because of love, and it resolves sufferings from within.

Leonardo Boff has carried out many dialogues about these issues. He underlines that one does not exactly know what is masculine and what is feminine; rather Boff stresses the value of different energies and relationships; and has developed writings with philosophers and social activists Rose Marie Muraro and Lucia Ribeiro.¹² Boff explains the complexity of being different and being together; how the feminine is present in men and is more

¹¹ Humberto Maturana and Ximana Davila, *Habitar Humano*, Santiago: JC Saez, 2008. 210-211; in several moments Maturana underlines “she shows...”, not in the sense of ideas but rather as dialogical knowledge. Moreover, Maturana thanks Davila for allowing him to see that “suffering that implies asking for help is always a cultural experience ... and that being free of this cultural jail means that he or she understands him/herself as the source and realization of the Biology of Love (and when this does not exist, one is trapped by pain)”, Maturana and Davila, pg. 232.

¹² L. Boff, “Masculino/Feminino: o que é o ser humano?”, in SOTER, *Genero e Teologia*, (Sao Paulo: Loyola, 2003, 203-216); Leonardo Boff, Rose Marie Muraro, *Feminino e Masculino, uma nova consciencia para o encontro das diferencas* (Rio: Sextante, 2002), Leonardo Boff, Lucia Ribeiro, *Masculino/Feminino, experiencias vividas* (Rio: Record, 2007); these three books are shared productions, and not a mixture of texts.

important in women; how the masculine is present in women but has greater weight in men. This allows a better understanding of what is predominant, and what is present as a minor reality, of what is within and what is an 'otherness', of the way we think with our bodies, and the way symbols are meaningful. Moreover, humans are active and passive, we take care of others and are taken care of by others. These are correlational dynamics. However, personal events are not the last word. According to Boff, the thirst for transcendence goes beyond each human being.

Another crucial issue is the transcendence of imagination. Unfortunately, when compared with analytical concepts, images and intuitions are sometimes considered negatively. Concerning this problem, Francisco Reyes criticizes the fact that imagination "is culturally considered as feminine and childish, in comparison with reason (what 'I know') and with objective scientific arguments. A denial of imagination diminishes and mutilates the human condition"¹³. Reyes adds that the epistemological status of imagination may be considered as important as human reasoning. This help us to be aware that insights, imaginations, historical initiatives of women, belong to a wholistic epistemology. Since feminine imagery usually claims no ownership over things and persons, it goes forward in a liberating/transcendent direction.

3) Becoming deeply human.

Feminity is experienced (and may be understood) in several ways. Here I am emphasizing its movement towards being genuinely alive. It happens among us humans and in positive links with the environment and with sacred entities. In today's world (and obviously also within us men), the feminine in correlation with the masculine may move towards deeper humanization. This basic desire goes together with other major thrusts; namely, to move from being ego-centered to become we-centered, from anthropocentric domination to biocentric liberation, from absolute essences (feminine, masculine) towards correlation among different factors, from obsessive humanism to eco-human challenges, from postmodern hedonism towards corporal/spiritual pleasure. These movements or

¹³ F. Reyes, "La masculinidad como una construcción imaginaria", Journal *Mandrágora* 12 (2006), Sao Paulo; and his outstanding book *Otra masculinidad posible* (Bogotá: Dimensión Educativa, 2003).

tendencies are thus not towards an I-centered success, but rather to walk in solidarity, between much darkness and abundant light, towards shared goods.

Concerning feminity, it has been said that it is somewhat like a dynamic mostly in women, and partially within men. Some men experience it as a special 'inner energy', as 'otherness' within me. Here Jungian elements are enriched when meaningfully blended with psychoanalytic studies. For example, Sofía Uribe critically examines types of bonds that seem to belong to narcissism; moreover she writes in favor of dealing with conflicts, and she praises transformation through relationships¹⁴. Amanda Cueto says that being more human implies connections and also independence from the other; she points out that one sees "the other as a person both different and similar to oneself"; moreover, realistically one sees that "one is constituted as an incomplete being, and that death is ahead of each one of us"¹⁵. Such down to earth interpretations are eyeopeners and also help us to go beyond positivism.

However, there are also institutional borders. One does not only move from within; one belongs to particular material, political, human scenarios, that offer possibilities of growth, but that also are boundaries which constrain any activity. José Olavarría puts it this way: "both men and women have problems in their intimate and daily lives, and these experiences are due not only to personal relationships... nor only because of desires, phantasies, projects, but also due to public policy"¹⁶. Thus, one has to face global structures and dynamics that have an influence on what happens within any person and any relationship with others. We are conditioned by economic and cultural events in regions of the world, by inequality and violence of all kinds, by the media and educational institutions, by family, by social movements of resistance, by alternatives to the status quo. All of these

¹⁴ See Sofia Uribe "Los vínculos como gran tejido que construye humanidad", *Revista CLAR* 2 (2008), 33-42; her work in Colombia includes an analysis of patterns of control and superiority that are mostly phantasy; "narcissism requires being acknowledged by others, since one feels alive when being praised by others and its imagery..." (pg. 42); this certainly influences one type of masculine identity.

¹⁵ Psychoanalyst Amanda Cueto, "Hacerse humano. La difícil relación género-sexualidad" in Carlos Schickendantz (ed.), *Religión, género y sexualidad*, Córdoba: EDUCC, 2005, 59-60.

¹⁶ Jose Olavarría, *Hombres: identidad/es y violencia*, Santiago: CLACSO, 2001, 34; who spells out global economics, housing projects, educational structures, issues of health, family concerns.

function as frameworks for both femininity and masculinity; and all of them affect our good wishes for shared humanization.

When one is a member of a Christian community, such conditions and such strategies are tested according to evangelical criteria. Becoming more human with a gender perspective and praxis, how is it understood since we are coparticipants of the Body of the Risen Christ? What factors of femininity and of masculinity affect Christian communities in solidarity with all beings, and in a special way with the 'last ones'? According to the Gospel, believers share goods, and persons in need are taken care with tender charity and with justice. Such justice is due towards all discriminated women, and towards most men who have little or no power. We feel partnership with others and support each other within the Body of the Lord. Thus, spiritual interaction is not self-centered nor is it a religious seclusion. Rather, fruitful personal, social, gender strategies become open to actions of the Spirit of Christ, who in mysterious ways is present in all human experience.

Because there are theological criteria one confronts any kind of omnipotence; neither men nor women are deities. Rather, faith in the Lord moves us to live among the humble, and also demands us to confront arrogant and oppressive elites (and to confront oneself when such things happen within). Unfortunately being surrounded by unjust powers and patriarchy, some men and women play divine roles pretending to control everyone. One wishes that in us men, femininity may continue as a source of solidarity and freedom. This attitude emerges from being disciples of a humble and courageous Jesus who called disciples to be friends of all, and not masters.

This implies walking with persons, and preferentially moving among the marginalized. It also implies dreaming, building networks, taking care of others with tenderness and justice. Persons are sacraments of God. As Guillermo Campuzano says: "the poor lead us to a radical humility, they allow us to become more human, since they reveal our deepest fragility, and they save us because what we accomplish with them we are

carrying out with Christ (Mt 25,31ss)”¹⁷. Salvation comes from below, from vulnerable people. This mystical/political experience moves mountains.

In other words, being followers of Jesus does not happen in complicity with interests and mental frameworks of the powerful; nor is it a product of doctrinal speculation. It is hard for us men to carry all of this out in everyday existence. What does it imply for men vis a vis androcentrism? How are we breaking the chains of economic and cultural privileges? The starting point of a masculine journey of faith is the acceptance of vulnerability in the midst of other persons, and of openness to the Spirit of Christ so that relationships are not defined by self-pride, but rather by radical discipleship.

Each man is challenged by relationships that arise out of fragility and out of tendencies towards compassionate power. This may influence all of one’s behavior, and also allow us to reconstruct masculine sexuality. Any person is easily trapped by hedonism and by other forms of being unilateral and oppressive. Maricarmen Bracamonte writes: “one is born woman or man... the feminine and the masculine does not arise automatically from biology, nor from only cultural factors... in a religious way of looking at it, it is a process that has historical-transcendent meaning... in one’s intimate and loving relationship with God we may as women and men share God’s wishes that we enjoy life in abundance”¹⁸. Healthy experiences of sexuality and of gender lead to a relational spirituality.

This is discovered throughout one’s human journey. It is not like a birth certificate nor like membership in a church. A relational spirituality is not mere tolerance nor feelings with others, one-self, and sacred entities. It requires breaking away from I-ism (‘yo-ismo’), from a *machista* culture, from treating others (and the sacred) as objects, from arrogant patriarchy. It implies partnership in building bonds, and in traditional relationships..

Each one is empowered relationally, in so far as there is interaction with personal wishes and needs and rights of others; one enjoys links with persons who are close and often have quite different journeys in life. Such positive discoveries place us at the

¹⁷ Guillermo Campuzano, “Humanización: camino y misión de la vida consagrada”, *Revista CLAR*, Bogotá, XLVIV/1 (2011) 41.

¹⁸ Maricarmen Bracamonte, “El don de la sexualidad y la tarea de recrearla: de la fragmentación a la integración”, *Revista CLAR*, Bogotá, XLVI/2 (2008), 12 y 21.

doorsteps of the mystery of Love. There is an insight into a relational Mystery, due to contact with other persons, within myself, in events inside and outside (and in the midst of one's shortcomings). This may be called standing before God, and enjoying daily silence before transcendence. Other faith traditions have other languages. What is crucial is encountering the sacred through links with all that happens in the universe.

Bonds -both with other men and with women- are appreciated with ethical criteria. If one follows an ethics inspired in the Gospel of Jesus, the key attitudes are thanksgiving for others and oneself ('love neighbor as yourself'), humility before God, not considering oneself as sacred, and unconditional dedication to needs of one's neighbor and preferentially to the poor. Members of a Christian community interact with others without much speculation. Being genuinely interconnected means neither explicit nor undercover dominion. A true disciple has no ownership over fellow men (and obviously one also struggles so as not to control and invade existence of women).

Why this type of ethics? Because God grants a relational freedom to all entities of the universe, and to us men and women. Also because as members of God's family we are sons and daughters, sisters and brothers (and not socio-cultural rulers over each other). God's people is not religion-centered, but is rather called to unconditional mercy and mutual service. In the case of our communities they are summoned by the Spirit to be at the service of humanity's well being. In doctrinal language, it is said that the church is -for humanity- a sacramental signs of salvation.

There is also more openness to the Word of God. Briefly I describe an experience. As members of Amerindia network, during months our local group has been reflecting with Pagola's *Jesus, una aproximación histórica*. He has fascinating inputs, like this one: "Jesus' movement prepares and is an anticipation of the kingdom of God... it has to be a community where women and men, as Jesus did, embrace, bless, take care of persons who are fragile and small..."¹⁹. As we reflected on this biblical theology, a friend (Adriana Palacios) allowed me to see how "Jesus projects the feminine into the existence of the

¹⁹ Jose Antonio Pagola, *Jesus, aproximación histórica*, Madrid: PPC, 2008, 228.

community... and invites us to see God with new eyes”²⁰. Many give witness of how persons (and in a special way women) empower us to rediscover how God moves our lives. Feminist understandings of God come from other persons (as in the case just mentioned) and also may arise from one’s own feminity. Thus the Spirit moves hearts, minds, hands. Maria Angeles Martinez underlines Jesus’ contacts with women who are disciples of the Lord²¹. They share with us paths of the Lord. Such voices enlighten men’s spirituality with qualities of feminity.

As this essay comes to an end, may I underline concerns and persuasions. Reflections on masculinity cover key dimensions of everyday identity, power, economics, symbols of faith, personal options. Together with important research and writings about gender, I have underlined experiential concerns. Throughout the last decades I have been thanking persons, networks, institutions, spaces of spirituality, theologians, social activists, who allow me to collaborate in gender concerns. Both masculinity and feminity deserve to be on top of our agendas, as persons seeking meaningful and just relationships, and also as theologians who are on the paths of being more human.

The starting point has been socio-spiritual disestablishment, and concrete changes in routine. It implies a radical critique of behaviors, new connections with others, intimacy. One is often unaware of complicity and naive participation in androcentric structures that hurt women, fellow-men, the environment. Therefore, a wrenching conversion is a beginning (and an unceasing process). It is wrenching and healing. All of this happens together with psychological and political connectivity with feminity in oneself. In Latin America some good examples are Humberto Maturana, Leonardo Boff, Francisco Reyes, Jose Olavarria, religious in Brazil. Today we have clear proposals for men who wish to leave aside patriarchal jails and choose to join humanity that strives for well-being. Men become empowered due to one’s masculine qualities, and due to creative assimilation of one’s feminity. This wholistic process includes disengagement from evil stereotypes, an inner crisis, new bonds, transcendent experiences.

²⁰ Group of Amerindia, in Chile, 23/6/2012. *Amerindia* begun in the late seventees, has been and continues to be a space of deep friendship, Christian leadership, social commitments.

²¹ See Maria A. Martinez, “Volver a Jesús, narración entre mujeres”, *Pastoral Popular*, Santiago de Chile, 326 (2012), 12-17.

Jesus' life and message are paradigmatic and most challenging. Oneself and other men are urged to give witness to joyful and liberating Beatitudes, and to be efficient servants and not sacred masters. Inspired by the prophet of Nazaret, a christian community gives witness of reciprocity in Love. We are urged to relate to women as friends and as lovers, and to be disciples as men who are not rulers of the world.

Concerning social, academic, ecclesial institutions (where some of us earn our daily bread), one has to relinquish being a ruler and to leave aside ingrained habits of superiority over others (women and fellow men). We claim to be communities led by the Spirit. This requires unending changes in gender behavior. For example, accepting God's kingdom of happiness implies stepping down from omnipotent structures, giving up idols of power, refusing to be treated as direct representatives of the divine, and, what is most important, enjoying bonds among different persons who share a passion for Life.

At the end of this essay allow me to reword Pedro Casaldaliga's insight (quoted at the beginning of this essay). The neo-liberal and pos-modern 'I' (that suffocates other entities) may interact with a 'You' and be transformed into a 'We'. May there be a reconstruction of being human within each man that has masculine qualities and also femininity (although this dynamism is often caricatured and even denied). Hopefully, masculine experience can be reconciled with femininity. Since bonds are fragile, one walks ahead with patience and creativity. In a violent and posmodern context, relationships are like sharing recently baked bread and delicious fruits with the lowly.

In solidarity with the marginalized, men are reborn since there are plenty of masculine strengths and qualities, and since femininity is an inner energy. With a relational spiritual thrust, all persons walk ahead and contribute to freedom. This happens in a transcendent here and now.